THE CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH

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THE CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH,

AND

THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S

SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR,

AS A

MEANS OF BRINGING THEM TOGETHER.

BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY.

TO THE MANY MEMBERS

OF THE

Williston Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor,

WHO HAVE

SO OFTEN LIGHTENED THEIR PASTOR'S LABORS,

AND

CHEERED THEIR PASTOR'S HEART,

THIS BOOK

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFATORY.

SOME time ago a chance article published in the *Congregationalist*, entitled "How One Church looks after its Young People," describing the methods of the Society of Christian Endeavor, was received with considerable favor, and was republished in various papers in this country and abroad. This article unexpectedly brought to the author many letters asking for further particulars. To these he responded as fully as his time would permit, while he tried to reply to them at greater length by other articles in various religious newspapers. The correspondence, however, soon grew quite beyond his ability to furnish careful replies, and this opened up the whole question of Christian nurture as a practical matter. It became evident that there was, among pastors and other Christian workers, a widespread desire for any light, however feeble, which might be shed on the relation of children to the church. This little book is an attempt to answer the questions thus raised, and to solve the problems suggested, by stating, as clearly as possible, the needs and difficulties in the way of Christian nurture, and by presenting a practical plan to accomplish this end which in many cases has proved successful. In the sixth chapter, many questions which have been ad-

dressed to the author have been considered in a more thorough manner than could be done in private correspondence, and it is hoped that these answers may be of some service to many others who have not written him upon the subject. The Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor is in no sense a sectarian organization. One of the first societies established, after the first article before alluded to appeared, was in a large Baptist church in Connecticut. Many have been started in Methodist, Free Baptist, Baptist, and Presbyterian as well as Congregational churches. It is hoped that no denominational lines will interfere with this method of bringing children and young people into the service. The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Edersheim's "Social Customs of the Jews in the Time of Christ," to the "Bible Educator," to Dr. Bushnell's "Christian Nurture," to Dr. Cuyler for the earliest suggestion of this method of reaching the young, and to many of his brethren for their cordial sympathy and helpful counsel.

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INTRODUCTION.

HERE is a good thing for the church of Christ, for the Christian home, and for all that have the care of the young. You will not lay it aside till you have gathered the honey.

The plan is a fresh seed, dropped into the new soil of youth, and promises much. In the fields of the young there is no fallow ground; everything grows in the spring-time, wheat and tares.

This book is born of an earnest effort to keep the young within reach of direct Christian influence, bringing them to Christ, and into His fold; rearing them, not for His service, but in it, leaving no time nor place for "sowing wild oats."

The guides of youth have made provision for these oats much too long.

The book is neither a plea for Christian nurture without conversion, nor for conversion without nurture, — looking toward the work outside the church or apart from it, — but for planting and training the young in the household of faith in a living, practical way.

The child problem is one of the most pressing at this hour. Mammon has no happy old people, however much delight he may promise the boys and girls at the start. They follow, to be deceived and destroyed. It is very hard for God to get a hearing in any human heart, yet it is easier to reach the child heart than any other. Lose not the hour of childhood.

The consequences of sin in this world, and in every world, are fearful. The sooner the child life is cleansed, through the blood of the Crucified One, and the new life from above is begun, the better every way; God has no sorrow so great as seeing a soul in sin. He comes with His deliverance now, if we will open to Him. He is of God who heareth the words of God.

How can the young be made to see the vast advantages that surround them, and be led to improve their opportunities as they ought?

No question comes to parents of this generation with deeper solicitude than this, — unlimited stores of knowledge on every side, privileges and blessings for mind and heart without end, and often so little appetite on the part of the children for them. Parents lead their young to the fountains of living water; everything is made beautiful and attractive, and still they do not care to drink. How shall they be induced to? What can be done if there is no hunger for life's true knowledge, no thirst for God's word and service?

Blessings on him who shall impart the teaching skill, and give the relish for divine things, and know how to feed the lambs.

Every boy has his time to awake and grow to a wise, Christian manhood; every girl her opportunity to rise and put on her garments of Christian beauty, and begin her ministry of love and helpfulness. This time gone unimproved, life's best hour is passed. This era in child life comes and goes as the clover blossoms, and then heat and drought and waste. The summer is ended. The bright, sweet song of the Gospel has been sung to the soul; all that follow are broken lays. The young need to be taken in this early bloom, set into the life of God, that

they may be enclosed in His gardens, and kept fragrant and fresh forever. The sun puts its finger on the bud of a tender plant and it flowers, so let Christ lay His hand on the plants in the home.

"In the kingdom of Thy grace
Grant a little child a place."

The children must have their portion at home and in the Lord's house. It must be constant and wholesome and "convenient" for them. "If we would have better sheep, we must take better care of the lambs"; we must make a place for them in confession of Christ and service, in worship and work, in giving and doing. Let the Christian duties all begin in childhood, when faith and love begin. The young repay many fold for all the thought and care bestowed upon them by the church. It is the divine order and method, old and young moving together along the homeward way. It helps to keep the parental heart and hearthstone warm. The children gathered into the worship make the church like a Christian service, glad with song and promise and youthful joy all the year round.

And why should it not be so?

When the great Shepherd comes to draw water for His flock on the Lord's day, how good it is to find all the fold gathered and ready, sheep and lambs alike. The Lord's ministry is to them both, in invitation and blessing. He carries every kind of food in the same hand.

The old are twice blessed in the blessing on the young. Many a little girl is a Christian at four years of age. Many a boy at seven; some earlier. "Feed my lambs," says the Master. Arrange to do it by system and in faith; gather them in, carry the weak ones. Let the truth be unsealed and applied to all their needs. In no other way can so

effective and valuable Christian workers be made. All their faculties, taken early, will be limbered and made flexible and deft in their Lord's use.

Do not let us of this age stumble any longer over these great and self-evident truths. Every work has its special wisdom by which it is best done. The secret of success in winning the world for Christ and building the church of God is in gaining and saving the children. That done, all the rest comes as a consequence; for the world's manhood is secure when we have gained its childhood.

The state of the heart toward God determines one's moral condition. That state may be made right in childhood easier than at any other time thereafter. If the heart should with difficulty be brought to God later, the aftermath of the autumn Christian is not like the abounding green of the early summer time.

Why should Christian parents wait, before they strive to make their children Christians, till there has been a funeral among the group of little ones? Why should the pastor's first prayer in the home be at the bedside of the sick?

The method set forth in this volume is no longer an experiment. It has been very successfully tried by the author, and by many others, who, adopting the suggestions of the author, are happy to attest their great practical value.

The Society of Christian Endeavor, brought from Portland to St Louis without injury, is one of the busiest bees in the Pilgrim hive. It brings in honey and comb, and finds many wayside flowers that had been overlooked. It comes in every day rich with golden power. It is one of the special helps to the pastor. It is wings for him, and flies all over the city.

This work is not intended to be a mere sentiment or theory thrown out, but a working plan for organization and use in every church where it shall find favor, till it gives place to something better.

C. L. GOODELL.

St. Louis, November, 1882.

THE CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

CHILD LIFE IN THE BIBLE.

Jewish Customs respecting Child Life. — Different Names applied to Children. — The Naturalness of Child Life in the Bible. — Bible Child Life a Religious Life. — The Religious Life of the Child a Growth. — A Word to Parents.

In considering the relation of children to the church, and in attempting to devise measures for bringing young people into closer relationship and fellowship with the church, it is wise for us to consider first of all the Bible position in regard to the religious nurture of children. This is not a difficult task, for the Scriptures leave no doubt in the minds of most readers in regard to the supreme importance they attach to the early and careful religious training of the young. The Bible treats child life as it does every other subject, in accordance with the customs in vogue at the time it was written ; and from its general tenor, we have every reason to suppose that it approves and supports these existing customs. Thus, in order fitly to appreciate the child life of the Bible, we must inquire how children were regarded, what was

their education, and how much attention was paid to them by the Jews, the people among whom the Bible was written. When we turn to this subject we are surprised to find how large is its literature. The very number and variety and minuteness of the names for "child" show the importance of child life, and the close scrutiny with which it was watched. There were no less than nine of these names, denoting the different stages of the child's history. Besides the general names for son or daughter, there was one that meant "the newly born" child, another that meant "the suckling," another still that referred to the time just before weaning, and a fourth that meant the weaned child. When he becomes a little older and begins to go alone with short and tottering steps, he is called *taph*, or "the quickly stepping one," — or "the little trotter," as we might phrase it. When he becomes still older, and is able to help his parents, he is called *elem*, or "the strong." When able to defend and take care of himself, he is *naar*, or "free"; and when he has attained his majority and is fit for military service, then he is *bachur*, or "matured," — "the ripe one." What a watchful eye do all these names indicate! By following them along we can almost see the development and growth of the Jewish youth and maiden. Immediately after the birth of the child it was washed, rubbed with salt, and wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and the announcement of its birth was hailed with joy, especially if it was a son. When the boy was eight days old he received his name, and the rite of circumcision was performed.

Twenty-two days after this his father redeemed him by giving to the priest thirty shekels of the sanctuary, thus acknowledging in a most forcible way that he belonged to the Lord who gave him. The ceremony of redemption was performed in this way: The parents of the month-old child made a feast for their friends, and invited a priest, who must be a lineal descendant of Aaron. Having offered grace and some introductory prayers, the priest looks at the child and at the price of redemption, and asks the father which he would prefer, the money or the child. Upon the father's reply that he would rather pay the price of redemption, the priest takes the money and swings it round the infant's head, saying, "This is for the first-born; this is in lieu of it; this redeems it. And let this son be spared for life, for the law of God, and for the fear of heaven." The priest then lays his hand upon the child's head and blesses him, and the rite is over. Does not this custom, as some one* has remarked, bring to us with new force the Apostle Peter's words, "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot"?

When the child was weaned the event was celebrated by a feast given by the parents to their friends, and when he had become the "quickly stepping" little one he was dressed in the fringed or

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*Rev. Dr. Ginsburg, from whose writings many of these facts, concerning the upbringing of Jewish children, have been obtained.

tasselled garment: and now his religious education began, for he was taught that the word which stood for this tasselled garment was the Hebrew numeral for six hundred, and that this six hundred, with the eight threads and five knots that composed the tassels, made up six hundred and thirteen, the number of precepts in the law; and hence the tasselled garment in which the little boy was arrayed was a symbol to him of the perfect law. During the earliest period of the child's life the mother had his training solely in her hands; but when the boy became a little older the father undertook his religious teaching, while the mother was responsible for the girls until they were married.

At the age of five the boy began to learn the Bible, and at the age of ten the collection of Jewish traditions. The parents were the teachers, and it is a singular fact that we read of no schools in the Bible until after the Babylonish captivity. The reason for this is plain Before this there was no need of them, for during a sixth part of a Jew's time, labor was prohibited by Sabbaths and sacred feasts, and this time the parents occupied in teaching their children. But when the Jewish father came to resemble the modern Christian father, so much wrapped up in his business that he had no time to teach his children, then schools were established, but under the strictest regulations. They must not be in a crowded or unwholesome part of the town; they must not be near a river that was crossed by an unsafe bridge; no teacher could have more than twenty-five pupils

under his charge; and the parents always took care that their children were in the class at the proper time. In these schools, too, the greatest attention was paid to the manners of the children. They must salute every one they met on the street, and not to respond to a salutation was considered as bad as committing a robbery. An ordinary man was greeted with the words, "Peace be with thee!" a teacher, "Peace be with thee, my teacher and my master"; and a king, "Peace be with thee, my king, peace." Compare this polite greeting with the impertinent stare or the saucy salutation of many a modern school-boy.

We have dwelt somewhat at length on these Jewish customs in the upbringing of children, for more than anything else do they throw light upon the child life of the Bible. In fact, the child life of the Jews is the child life approved and moulded by the Bible. The same rites that we have described were performed for Samuel and Saul and David. In this same fringed garment was the little Solomon clothed, and the infant Isaiah and Daniel. These same precepts were taught in this way to Paul and Peter and John and James. These same salutations dropped from the lips of Timothy, so carefully trained. Yes, and these same blessings were pronounced over the unconscious head of the infant Jesus. In the same garment was He clothed. He was taught this same rule concerning the knots and fringes, and in sweet, boyish accents, we may believe, there fell from His lips, too, the quaint greeting, "Peace be with thee,

my teacher and master, peace." Surely anything that throws light upon or is glorified by His blessed life is of supreme interest to us. We have a few examples of child life recorded in the Bible. Something is told us of Joseph as a boy. Samuel's early days are dwelt upon. Allusions are made to the infancy of Josiah and a few of the kings of Judah; and the door of that carpenter's house in Nazareth is occasionally left ajar, that we may get brief glimpses of the blessed child life of Jesus. From these few passages, as well as from what we know of the customs of the times, we learn in the first place that *the child life of Bible characters and Bible days was natural and sensible.* The goody, precocious, unearthly children, who are always saying such wonderful things, and never giving any evidence of having inherited the weaknesses of Adam's race, and who always used to die before they advanced beyond this stage of pious and precocious reflection, do not exist in the Bible. The children of the Bible are pre-eminently childlike. There is nothing about them which leads us to believe that to be "saintly towards the heavens is to be sickly towards the earth." While they are children, they speak as children, they understand as children, they think as children; it is not until they become men that they put away childish things. A study of their lives gives us the impression that it is just as unnatural and unwholesome for a child to act like a man as for a man to act like a child. Indeed, it was part of the educational code of the Jews that the

child was not to be forced. One of their sententious maxims was, "If you set your child to regular study before it is six years old, you shall always have to run after and yet never get hold of it."

Look at the story of the infant Samuel, for example. How perfectly natural, simple, childlike it is! And yet a miraculous event occurred. God himself is one of the speakers. There is every temptation for the writer to make the little boy preternatural in wisdom. Many a modern writer describing the scene would have made him talk more wisely than Eli himself. But the pen of inspiration never makes such mistakes. The child is still a child even when he talks with God. As we follow the story of that marvellous night of vision, we do not find anything strained, unnatural, precocious in it all. Here, if anywhere, should we expect a departure from childlike simplicity; and yet Samuel, in spite of his visions and early prophetic gifts, was a simple, natural boy. And when we turn over the pages of sacred story, and turn with them the leaves of twelve hundred years of the world's history, we see nothing in that perfect child life, which began in the manger and was continued in Nazareth, that contradicts our proposition that child life in the Bible is natural and simple.

It becomes us to speak with care and reverence of the immaculate life of the child Jesus, and yet we challenge any one to find there anything inconsistent with the boy nature that He is represented as endued with. Even that scene in the temple where He is

shown to us at twelve years of age as both hearing the doctors and asking them questions is not so unnatural as we are inclined to think. Every Jewish child from a devout family was well trained in the law, and had a right in the synagogue to ask his elders questions, or to give them his views; but it was all done in a natural, childlike, appropriate way. The conceited Josephus tells us that the doctors came to consult him concerning the law before he was fourteen; but we hear no such boast concerning Jesus. And this action of our Lord's did not seem to fill His parents with any wonder or awe, for they immediately began to chide Him in their short-sighted wisdom for eluding their search. The Apocryphal Gospels are filled with the miracles of the boy Jesus. According to them He made clay birds to fly, and struck a little companion dead for blasphemy, and raised the dead to life again. But their very unnaturalness brands them as spurious. When we compare them with the sweet, simple, unostentatious accounts of the true Gospels, we see how incomparably better it is for a child to be a child. We see that even the Lord of all, when He took human flesh, did not transgress the laws of child life.

But again, while child life in the Bible is eminently simple and natural, *it is also eminently religious.* These two elements must not be divorced in our minds, if we would see the children of the next generation grow up into the kingdom of God. A religious life, a life of faith and prayer, a Christ-like life, is natural for a child, and we make a woful mistake

when we think that there is a certain amount of boyish wickedness and girlish frivolity which must be run through before the religious life can begin. How did our Saviour himself represent the religious life to the thronging crowds? "Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." A child, do we say, cannot be religious because he is still a child? This is a fearful mistake to act upon. Cannot a rosebud contain the sweetest fragrance and be painted with the most delicate colors because it is yet a bud and not a full-blown flower? Cannot the tiny cascade that flows down the mountain-side be pure and sparkling and life-giving because it is not yet a sweeping, rushing river? We expect to find fragrance in the bud and purity in the mountain rill; we should expect to find religious fragrance and purity in the child's life, implanted there very early by the Saviour of little children. We should look for it, plan for it, and be alarmed if we do not find it; and regard a young soul without it as a distorted and ill-proportioned object, a soul that lacks its chief excellence, just as a scentless bud or a brackish mountain brook would be regarded. But this early religious life, we must remember, does not take care of itself, any more than a rosebud springs up out of the ground without care; the soil must be prepared, the seed must be dropped, the little plant must be watered and nourished and pruned and trained.

The education of the Jewish children, as we have seen, was eminently a religious training. "If you ask a Jew," says Josephus, "concerning any matter concerning the law, he can more easily explain it than tell his own name; since we learn it from the first beginning of intelligence, it is, as it were, graven on our souls." "The Jews," says Philo, "look on their laws as revelations from God, and are taught them from their earliest infancy; they bear the image of the law on their souls." The children were bound to worship God in his sanctuary "as soon as they were able," was the regulation, "with the help of their fathers' hand, to climb the flight of steps into the temple courts." This was the way Samuel was trained, and David and John and Timothy; and because of this training they became Samuel and David and John and Timothy. It depends upon the parents and teachers of to-day what the next generation shall be, and it depends upon what they do and teach to-day. We have the clean, white, smooth tablets in our hands, in the souls of our children: what shall we write thereon, religion or worldliness?

Again, *child life in the Bible is always represented as a constant growth.*

Over and over again we are told the child Samuel grew before the Lord. "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him." Of John the Baptist as a child it is said, "He grew and waxed strong in spirit." And even of our Lord Himself the same words are used. How we should shrink from using such an expression if we had no inspired authority

for it! The Saviour grew, increased in spiritual power! "Why," we should say, "it is almost blasphemy to speak thus." But the Bible says so. "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and the grace of God was on him." This idea is universal throughout the Bible. To become religious does not make a prodigy of a boy or girl. It does not ripen and mature the character all at once. It is not a hot-bed process. The religious child is still a child, needing training, instruction, warning, and we must not expect or look for anything else. When we see the seed sown in fickle April weather springing up in April and flowering in April and bearing fruit in April, when we see saplings grow visibly before our eyes, expand in girth and throw out far-reaching roots and gigantic limbs in a single season, then may we expect to see a child Christian become an old Christian in a week; but till then we need not expect to see any such phenomena. Of course a child's ideas of religion are crude, of course his knowledge of duty is imperfect, of course he falls into childish blunders and errors; there would be no such thing as growth in grace were it otherwise. But the acorn contains the oak, the straight, branchless sapling is the forerunner of the wide-spreading shade tree; in the child Christian's heart lie the germs of the aged Christian's experience.

We think there is a lesson of vast importance in these considerations of child life in the Bible. We beg for it careful and prayerful attention, for it is a lesson which the church has too long neglected to

its own sad hurt. It is this: It is natural, it is possible, it is desirable for children to grow up into Christian manhood and womanhood without experiencing any sharp and sudden transition from an evil life to a good life. Nay, it is not only possible and desirable, it is the thing we ought to expect; it ought to be as common for young children to be born into the kingdom of God as to be born into the world. It is possible and natural for children to be converted at their mothers' knee, and never know the time when they did not love the Saviour. And this should not be something rare, occasional, remarkable, a phenomenon, a thing to excite remark, like a comet or a meteor. It should be the usual, expected thing that children of religious parents should choose to live for the Saviour as early as they are able to make any choice, and should be received into the church and receive its nurturing, fostering care. Search the child biographies of the Bible through and see if this idea is not borne out. Was Samuel a wise, independent man before he heard God speak his name? Was John the Baptist allowed to sow any wild oats before he became a preacher of righteousness? Could Timothy better have strengthened the early church if he had been a *roué* in his youth? Did Jesus Himself pass through no period of boyhood growth? Did even He not require thirty long years of training before He called a single disciple to Him? The churches and Christian parents at large have had their eyes blinded to this matter. The church has often said to the children, "You cannot come in

here: stand out there in the vestibule until you are grown up"; and a very cold, cheerless vestibule it has often been. Or else it has said, "Go to the Sunday school: that will do for you while you are young." Devout parents have prayed earnestly that their children might become Christian *men and women*, but they have forgotten to pray that they might become Christian *boys and girls;* and the men and women have too often remained what the boys and girls were. It has been considered almost a necessity that they should become somewhat bad before becoming very good. Hence the sad lapses from virtue in the children of Christian parents; hence the drunken boys and ruined girls who have brought shame into Christian homes; hence the facts which have given rise to the old saw about ministers' sons and deacons' daughters.

The doctrines of conversion, conviction of sin, and regeneration have been monstrously perverted when they have been made to teach that in every case, whatever the natural disposition or early training, there must be a sudden, conscious, terrible wrench from old ways of living; for it shuts out all childish conversions, and makes a youth of sin indispensable to an old age of godliness. This explains many of the terrible revelations which praying parents have had concerning their sons and daughters. They have looked and longed and prayed for a sudden, thrilling conversion and experience for their children, rather than for a very early turning to God and growth in grace. This sudden, thrilling experience

never came, but ruin and disgrace and heart-ache have come, because the parents have not practically believed in a religious childhood. We believe that the Bible teaches that it is not necessary for young, innocent children to agonize over their sins, and mourn and weep like gray-haired offenders, and then come out of a terrible darkness into a marvellous light. We need not look for any such experience. The dawn comes gradually, the lightning with a blinding flash; but the daylight is far more useful than the lightning's glare, and he is a foolish parent who says, "I will not believe that my child has any light until the electric flash strikes him blind with its dazzling rays." It depends very largely upon Christian parents whether the day-dawn from on high shall come into their children's lives while they are very young and illuminate all their eternity. Let us plan for this, pray for this, expect this, and to our children will belong the blessed experience of never knowing a time when they were not Christians.

CHAPTER II.

IS THERE A PLACE IN THE CHURCH FOR CHILDREN?

Jerusalem, *full* of Boys and Girls *playing*. — A Place for Children in the Church. — Indicated by the Nature of Childhood. — By the Nature of Conversion. — By the Nature of the Church. — The Church of the Future.

OUGHT there to be a place in the church for children who have given their hearts to God? is one of the vital religious questions of the day. We do not mean to ask if there is a place in the church for an occasional child, one lamb among a hundred sheep. There always have been such sporadic cases, and the church has not often seriously objected to admitting the rare, precocious little saint. But the far more practical question is, ought there to be room in the bonds of church fellowship for the great mass of average boys and girls, who by judicious training and careful Christian nurture may be induced very early to give their hearts to God? Aye, we believe with all our heart there ought to be such a place. We believe that before many years there will be such a place in every true church, and it will be just as much expected that many young children will form part of the membership of every church as that there will be gray-haired men and women

there. Notice the terms of the prophecy of Zechariah concerning the future glory of God's kingdom, a prophecy which refers, undoubtedly, to the earthly kingdom which is often called by the name Jerusalem. "The streets of the city [Jerusalem] shall be *full* of boys and girls"; not here and there one who has somehow strayed within the walls, and is regarded as a prodigy and a wonder; not a few of the sickly and the weak, who step into the courts of the earthly Jerusalem for a little while as into the outer courts of the heavenly city: not this, but in that good day it shall be *full* of boys and girls; a large part of the membership of the church shall come into it in very early life. Of course, as in all cities many move into them in mature life, so many will always come into the church of God after a long residence outside; but it is also true that as in old cities and countries the great majority of the inhabitants are natives, so the great majority of the dwellers in God's earthly city should be, as it were, born within its walls, children of Christian parents, who have been trained for God's service from their infancy, and who never knew the time when they were not Christians.

Another point of this prophecy makes it clear that though they are in the city of God, they are boys and girls still. They do not become old men and women the moment they set foot within the church doors. They are child Christians, as well as children at school and at their plays. They do not eschew games and fun and romps and glee. They bring all

the exuberance and joyous, bubbling fulness of their lives into their new consecration. They are boys and girls "*playing* in the streets," not simply boys and girls walking demurely and soberly about the streets. Such boys and girls serve God with their base-ball and foot-ball and hop-scotch as well as in the prayer meeting and at the communion table. *The very nature of childhood teaches us that there is a place for children in the church.* Childhood is *innocent, ardent, sincere:* what three traits are more needed in the church of God, or better fit one for usefulness in it? Take, for instance, two men. One of them is all covered with the blotches of sin; it has tainted his blood, it has corrupted his imagination, it has made his talk foul. Moreover, he has grown hard and callous; nothing moves him. He believes in no one, and hence his own sincerity of character is impaired. Because he distrusts every one's honesty, he himself cannot be trusted. This is one man, whose counterpart we often see. Another man stands by his side. His life has always been governed by principle; he has been pure in thought and desire; he believes in purity in others; he is moved at the sight of heroism and true goodness; he is sincere in his attachments, and believes in the sincerity of others. Neither of these men are Christians; but which of them, other things being equal, is nearest the kingdom of God? Which is most fit for Christ's service? We say at once, "The comparatively pure, sincere man; the earnest, zealous man." But are purity, ardor, sincerity worth less in a child

than in a man? Do not these very traits, which are natural to the young, when they become energized and made fruitful by the Spirit of God, mark their possessors as the fittest candidates for the church of God?

Where does the recruiting officer look for new soldiers? Does he search among the battle-scarred survivors of the last fight, who came out of it wounded and decrepit, with the loss of a leg or an arm, or a bullet hole in their skins? Does he search through the hospitals and soldiers' homes for recruits? Rather, does he not look among the able-bodied young men who have not been scarred by bullet or wasted by fever? The tried veteran may be cooler under fire, and understand better the ruse and ambuscade of the enemy; but after all, the decimated regiments are not filled with such men. Why should we always seek to fill the army of the living God with those who have been worsted in the fight with selfishness and greed and lust? Whom do business men take into their stores to learn their business? They do not take some one with habits fixed, and will immovable, and intellect unteachable; somebody who, by years of other work, has contracted a distaste for their business. They take a boy and give him a boy's work to do; he becomes a young man, and has a young man's work to do; and by and by he becomes a partner, perhaps. Surely he makes a better man for the business than one who never entered the store until he signed the articles of partnership. Has not the church made a mistake

in neglecting the young recruits, in refusing to train its children from the very first within its own walls? The Holy Spirit does not prefer a broken and shattered harp to one that is full-stringed and musical. He uses earthen vessels, to be sure; but he cannot do more with one that is cracked and chipped and foul than with one that is whole and sound. Can we not truly say that the very characteristics of childhood show us that there is a place for the child in the church of God?

No less does the nature of conversion point us to the same fact. There is but one question of pre-eminent importance to ask of those who knock at the door of the church before it is opened for their admission, and that is, "Have you given your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and are you trying to do his will?" We do not ask, "Do you understand all the doctrines?" "Are you a theologian?" "Do you agree with us on all nice, metaphysical points?" These are not the questions, but "Are you trusting in the atoning merits of Christ for salvation, and are you trying every day to do His will? If so, the church is the place for you." We say it deliberately and thoughtfully: we believe an ordinary child of eight or ten years can understand just as well what conversion means, as a practical matter that concerns himself, as the most hoary sinner to whom the Spirit ever spoke. He cannot talk about it so well; he cannot analyze his feelings so well; he does not feel the same remorse for sin, for he has not committed the same sins to be remorseful about: but he

can appreciate the sacrifice of his Saviour; he can say, "Lord, I believe," just as sincerely as if his mind had been befogged by a course of German psychology. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So is *every one* that is born of the Spirit." So is the child, as well as the well-seasoned reprobate. Does not the same wind that bends the sturdy elm rustle the delicate petals of the rose-bush? Does not the same breeze that flutters the leaves on the topmost bough bend the grass blades in the meadows? "Great is the mystery of godliness." This is one of the mysteries: that while the ripest scholar cannot fully explain or understand all the provisions of the scheme of salvation, the simplest child, who has come to years of accountability, can know enough about it to accept its provisions and be saved. Let us ask the parents who read these pages if they do not believe that just as soon as their children become accountable for their deeds and liable to receive punishment for them, the loving Father of all provides a way of escape for them that is just as plain and easy for them to accept as for the parents themselves, who like them are accountable? We know, when we think of it, that it must be so. We know that just so soon as a child becomes an accountable being he may be saved from the sins for which he is accountable, or else the love of God becomes a delusion and a lie.

If all children need to be saved, if any child may

be saved, why will we not pray and labor and believe that *our* children may be saved? When the child gives good evidence of conversion, there ought to be no bar between him and the communion table of his dying Lord.

But some one says, "As an actual fact we do not find this state of affairs. It is comparatively seldom that we hear of young children being converted. It is only in rare instances of remarkable children." But is not this because we are unbelieving rather than because God is unwilling? Is it not because we do not expect and work for and pray for their conversion? Expect your children to be Christians early as much as you expect them to learn to walk and to learn to talk. Use means to make them such, and the anomalous cases will be those found outside of the church rather than within it.

Once more, the very nature of the church proves that there ought to be a place for children within it. Think of our common figurative names for the church! "It is a fold," we say. What is the use of a fold? Is it a high enclosure, built with pickets and a heavy padlock on the gate to keep out the lambs and to keep in the sheep? "It is a home." What is a home? Is it a boarding-house for all above a certain age who can furnish certificates of good moral character? Nay, it is not a complete home until there are prattling voices in the nursery, and little feet pattering up the stairs, and little hearts and heads to be trained for what is good and wise. "The church is a school," we sometimes hear it said. Yes, and

what is a school? A place for learned scholars to discuss knotty problems? Not generally, but a place where immature minds are trained and directed. If, then, we mean anything when we say that a church is a fold, a home, a school, we mean that there is a place in it for the child who is also a child of God. Says one of the wisest and most successful pastors of our land, speaking on this subject: "Every child that gives clear evidence of faith in Christ and a sincere love to Him is entitled to admission into the fold, especially if parents testify that they see such evidence at home. The Bible gives no limitation of age. As soon as a boy is old enough to do intentional wrong, he is old enough to do intentional right. As soon as he can sin, he can, by the help of God's spirit, repent of sin and lay hold on Christ. When conversion takes place, confession should follow. The church itself is not chiefly a higher university for the advanced growth and finishing off of ripe believers; it is Christ's training school, in which the alphabet truths are taught. Why keep one of Christ's scholars out of Christ's school until he has made the proficiency of a matured experience, or what is the use of a fold if the lambs are to be kept out in the cold until they can stand the weather?" In addition to these familiar figures, the church is often spoken of as a city, — the city of God. But in all earthly cities we encourage those whose parents reside in the city to make it their abode too. The very fact that their parents are citizens makes them citizens during their infancy.

As we have said before, we expect those whose parents live in the town to make the best citizens. It is only in the city of God that we do not carry out this principle. If it is the unwritten law of the church that our children shall wander away from it before they are brought into it, that they must drink the bitter waters of sin before they drink the sweet waters of salvation, shall we have any but ourselves to blame for the decadence of the church? This is not a matter which we can treat lightly or indifferently. The welfare of the church of God depends more upon the attention that is given to this problem and its right solution, during the next generation, than upon any other question. It ought to be the expected, well-understood thing that the children of church members should themselves become church members before they leave the parental roof. The exceptions to this rule should be looked upon as anomalous cases, as sad examples of perversity in face of the light, which only God in His infinite wisdom can explain.

We do not expect our children to become scholars unless we provide them books and send them to school and incite in them in every way a desire for study; but too many parents expect their children to become Christian, somehow, some time, in some mysterious way, though they seldom say a word to them about it, or intimate to them that they owe something to their souls as well as to their intellects.

We are no advocate of haste in the matter of children joining the church; of any inconsiderate

action. The evidences of a child's conversion should be looked to as carefully as those of an older person. How does he seem at home? Is he gentler, kinder, more considerate, more unselfish? Does he pray? Does he read the Bible? Parents know more about these evidences than the wisest church committee can learn. Does the child do right for Jesus' sake? If so, his place is beside his father and mother at the communion table. And then, when he takes his place there, the good work is just begun. Constant nurture is the price of a matured, well-rounded, symmetrical, Christian life. We do not turn our children loose in a school-room, and expect them to become ripe scholars, without any guidance or direction because there is a blackboard and a primer and a map and a globe there. We need not expect that children turned loose in the church will become ripe Christians, without care, simply because there is a cross and a Bible and a hymn book and a prayer meeting there. It has been well said, "Regeneration is simply a birth, and birth means infancy. Infancy necessitates feeding, nursing, watching, guidance. Presently come the stumblings and the tumbles of inexperience, and soon arises need of correction. If we always regarded a soul's conversion and open confession of Christ as we regard a birth in our own homes, our next thought would be about the nurture of the new-born immortal." There is no more danger of laxness and backsliding in a child Christian, trained with a reasonable degree of fidelity, than there is of a mature Christian falling from the grace

which has made him free. We will go further than this; we believe that the best results of Christian life can only be attained by those who, in early years, are brought into the church of God, and are trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Fathers and mothers hold the key to the situation. Upon their shoulders, more than upon any human instrumentality, rests the burden. They are responsible for the future strength or weakness of the church.

The pastor can do something for the children, but he cannot do all. The Sunday-school teachers can do much, but not all. The church can do far more than she has done to look after the young, but no one can remove from the parents or divide with them their responsibility.

"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts. There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age, and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls."

That prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. We can see in our mind's eye in one of the future years a great church gathered together. They are obeying that never obsolete precept of our Lord, "This do in remembrance of me." The emblematic bread and wine are before them. Not only a few of the more sedate and staid are gathered there, while the great mass of the young people go out, awaiting the assembling of the Sunday school in the afternoon as the only service for them; but all are there, in that church of the future; the grandfather and

grandmother tottering with age; the father and mother in the vigor of middle life; the boy verging into manhood; the girl blossoming into womanhood; the younger brother and sister; the little one, too, seven, eight, or nine years of age, bowing with reverence before the emblems of Him who died for young and old, of Him who shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom.

There are vacant places in some of those pews that we see in this vision of the church of the future, but they are not caused by the indifferent absence of young or old from that great family gathering, but the only vacant places are those which the great Teacher himself has made by taking some of the little pupils from the school below to the school above, without allowing them to pass through the university course of a long, earthly life. But, with these exceptions, these households are unbroken around the communion table of that church of the future. It is a strange circumstance, if any member of the family is voluntarily away. The service is begun. The Bible is opened. The leader reads, "Feed my sheep, feed my sheep." That is not forgotten, but these Christians do not stop there; they do not forget to read and obey the rest of Christ's commands, "Feed my lambs." In this picture of the future church, which our imagination summons up, this prophecy is fulfilled. Zion is full of boys and girls. The lambs are fed. May God speedily make this vision a blessed reality. May God soon send that glad day.

CHAPTER III.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP FOR CHILDREN.

The Need of It. — Shown by the Sluggish, Depleted State of our Churches. — The Difficulty of Impressing with Religious Truth Persons of Mature Years. — Obstacles. — Opposition and Indifference of Parents, Teachers, and Churches. — "I am afraid my Child will not hold out." — Unreasonable Expectations. — Encouragements. — Experience of Eminent Divines.

In the last chapter we attempted to show, from the nature of childhood and from the nature of the church, the evident relationship of one to the other. Let us pursue this subject a little further, and consider the need of bringing children into the church, and the objections and encouragements to early church membership. To show the necessity of adopting some means for promoting the numerical and spiritual growth of our churches, we need go no further than to the official record of any of our large denominations. The "Congregational Year-Book" for 1882 shows an apparent net loss in the whole denomination last year of 2,635 members; and even the most favorable showing gives an increase of only 3,500 members, or a net gain in the proportion of one to every one hundred and eleven church members. How long, at that rate, will the Congregational denomination be

in accomplishing its part toward converting the world to Christ? Other large denominational statistics tell a story but little brighter than this, while some sects have still more disastrous figures to face. There are thousands of churches, all our country over, in all denominations, which are growing smaller year after year, while others barely hold their own. These thinning ranks, however, can be filled with Christian boys and girls, who can be trained as the present generation of Christians has not been trained.

We do not think that we are exaggerating the truth one iota when we say that there are one million young people in the Sunday schools of our land, easily susceptible to the influences of the Holy Spirit and to the claims of religion, who might, within a single year, be converted and brought into our churches, if there were some efficient agency for their Christian nurture and training in every church.

Statistics are stubborn things; we cannot wink them out of sight, but we can change their story from one of disaster to one of victory by relying more on training to fill our churches than upon conquest. One great trouble with the church has been that it has depended almost exclusively upon conquest. It has looked with complacency upon the figures and facts which tell of its depletion, and has said, "Oh, well, it is all right, one of these days we will have a great revival. It is a time of declension just now, to be sure, but one of these days the Lord will raise up a great spiritual general, a Nettleton, or a Finney, or a Moody; we will institute a regular

warfare upon the Evil One ; sinners will be converted to Christ, the ranks of our churches will be swelled once more, and a great company of captives will be dragged at Zion's chariot wheels." What nation would neglect its own children and rely for growth on conquered foreigners ? Even Napoleon, king of conquest though he was, was wiser than this Though he laid every nation under tribute to France, his constant principle was, France must depend upon the children born upon her soil for her strength and glory, rather than upon the annexation of alien nations. "No nation can long thrive by a spirit of conquest," says Dr. Bushnell ; "no more can a church. There must be internal growth. Let us try if we may not train up our children in the way they should go. Simply this, if we can do it, will make the church multiply her numbers many fold more rapidly than now, with the advantage that more will be gained from without than now."

This, then, is one indication of the need of Christian nurture within the church : that the church is depleted, except in times of special revival, and that it relies for its strength upon conquest from without rather than upon growth from within.

The need of greater efforts in the line of Christian nurture is also shown by the acknowledged difficulty of reaching persons in mature life. Most persons who are converted to Christ are converted in early life. All religious statistics bear out this statement ; and yet, with this undisputed truth staring him in the face, the Christian often tries to turn the

soul to God only after it has become old and hardened and unimpressionable. He quite reverses the processes of nature, and uses the stiff, brittle mortar in building up a Christian character, and strikes his blows upon the cold, unyielding iron, and tries to bend the gnarled and toughened oak according to his will. The parent and Christian teacher very often say, practically, "My little boy, my little girl, you are quite too small to be a Christian now; but in about ten years, after you have been for a while a bad boy, a dissipated young man, a light-headed, frivolous young woman, — after you have been such a one for a certain number of years, then some powerful whirlwind of religious experience will smite you, and you will be dreadfully sorry for your sins, and then Christ will save you: but you must go through all this experience; you must do something wicked to be sorry for first; you must be somewhat bad before you can be very good." Not that any one says this in so many words; nay, any one would be shocked to have these words put into his mouth: but that is practically what every one says who urges children to wait until they are older and more experienced before they give their hearts to Him who, they are old enough to know, died for them. We must remember that the sapling is a sapling but once in its lifetime, and all the strength of a Hercules cannot make the oak-tree over into a flexible twig. The boy will be ten years old but once in his life, and when the flexible age is once passed it is forever passed. These, then, are some of the indications of

the need of greater attention to the conversion and Christian culture of young people.

Now, what are some of the outward obstacles in the way of the conversion of children and the nurture of child Christians? All these obstacles may be grouped under two heads, opposition and indifference, — the opposition and indifference of parents and teachers and churches. We are fully aware that much of this opposition is not intended as such, but it is none the less deadly. We know that many parents who love their children dearly, and respect the cause of religion, would yet hold back their Christian children from an open profession of religion because of what seemed to them the very best motives, — they fear that their children do not know what they are about, do not mean what they say, do not realize what a serious, far-reaching thing it is to be a Christian; and we sympathize with them in these fears, and see in them oftentimes only the excess of parental anxiety. But we would also remind them that the Bible has given us a test, and only one test, for conversion, and we need set up no other, — "By their fruits shall ye know them." The little slender apple-tree that has just come into bearing condition, and whose branches hang with a half-dozen apples, can be tested just as well as the tree that is loaded to the ground with fruit. "What fruit are your sons and daughters and Sunday-school scholars bearing?" That is the all-important question; not, "How old are they?" If you can see the fruits of the Spirit in their lives, beware how you treat them as other than the children of God!

Once more, the opposition of parents often arises from unreasonable expectations of perfection and growth in grace. Said one parent to a little girl scarcely a dozen years old, who had begun to serve God, "Now, my child, if you are a Christian I shall never expect you again to show the least sign of fretfulness or impatience as long as you live; and if you do, I shall conclude that you are deceived." If some great, supernatural being — an archangel, for example — should take that woman by the arm, and say to her, "You are a church member: now I shall never expect to see the least imperfection in your character; and if I observe the least flaw in temper, in disposition, in imagination, or in word, I shall conclude that you are deceived," we wonder how she would stand the test. "A child," says Dr. Bushnell, "acts out his present feeling, the feelings of the moment, without qualification or disguise; and how, many times, would all of us appear if we were to do the same?" We should expect only childlike faith of child Christians. A boy Christian does not become a gray-haired patriarch all at once. We should hope that he would love his skates and his sled and his marbles and his gun still. A girl Christian does not develop into a conventional matron all at once. We hope she would not discard her doll and her picture book and her games until she ceases to be a girl. The boy Christian can show his religion by playing marbles fairly, as well as the man Christian by selling goods fairly. The school-girl can show her religion by the soft answer and by docile amiability, as well

as her mother can show her religion by her gracious, lady-like bearing and her deeds of charity. The restrained temper, the ready obedience, fairness in sports, the willingness to pray and to read the Bible, the love of children's meetings, — these should all be taken as indications of the new life growing up within the young soul. The quick, parental eye, that is neither caustic nor over-critical, will very soon discern the germs of grace in the boy or girl whose heart is touched.

But, says another parent, "I fear my child will not hold out. I fear the present indications of Christ-likeness are the result of feeling rather than deep-rooted principle." Perhaps so; there is danger of this, to be sure, but wait and see. Do not pronounce it mere emotion until it has proved itself nothing more. One rough footstep on the tender plant, just sprouting from the ground, may crush it to the earth.

The parent is afraid his child will not hold out in the Christian life. "The Spirit of God, then," he seems to say, "is not equal to such a task as that of keeping his child from falling. God can sustain the bronzed and hardened sinner; He can keep the drunkard from falling; He can save the red-handed murderer's soul; and He can put His strong bands of love around the life of the gay, frivolous woman of the world, and preserve what little there is left of her heart from further corruption; but to keep the fresh soul of a comparatively innocent child is too much for His might. It

is a task quite beyond the Spirit's power." That is what the parent says who is unwilling that his child should start in the Christian life "for fear he won't hold out." We do not envy the feelings of that parent who looks to-day upon his grown-up son, hard, thoughtless, indifferent, unapproachable, and remembers that once, when that boy was younger, he wanted to be a Christian, but by home indifference or opposition was made to feel that he was too young to be saved. Is not the Spirit which guided little Samuel and the young Timothy, — yea, and with reverence we may add, the heart of the twelve-year-old Jesus, — is not that Spirit sufficient for the same work to-day? Is not the promise unto us and to *our children* which says that the Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh, so that your sons and your daughters shall prophesy?

Where, in the word of God, do we find any age limitation to the work of conversion? Surely, if there were any such limitation, it would be mentioned. We should not be left in ignorance upon such a very important subject. Where do we find the chapter and verse in which we are forbidden to look for and hope for and pray for the conversion of very young people? Does the Bible of any one of us read, "He which converteth the sinner, who is over twenty-one years old, from the errors of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins?" Has any one a new revision of the old Word which tells him that "they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever, provided that

those whom they turn are grown men and women"? Does our Bible tell us that "He who winneth souls, who have lived between twenty and eighty years in sin, is wise"? We do not find any such limitations, or hints of any such limitations, in the Scriptures; but we do find by implication and precept the truth taught that whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein, and that of such little children is the kingdom of heaven.

Not only the Bible but universal experience leads us to hope for and work for the conversion of children. We might, had we space, summon a cloud of witnesses. We will mention but a few distinguished names. Polycarp was converted at nine years of age, and was able to say when led to martyrdom, "Eighty-and-six years have I served Him, and He has never wronged me." Matthew Henry, we are told, was converted when eleven years old, Dr. Watts when nine, Bishop Hall when eleven, and Robert Hall when twelve. What parents, by preventing their children from confessing Christ, would dare to take the responsibility of preventing a Matthew Henry or a Robert Hall from blessing the world? We do not know who are in our families. There may be a Bishop Hall, there may be an Isaac Watts in one of these homes. At any rate, the sin is just as great of keeping back any true believer, however dull of intellect or weak in faith, from the open arms of the Saviour.

Says Dr. Theodore L. Cuyler, "It is no uncom-

mon thing for children of seven or eight years of age to have received more mental cultivation than we formerly looked for at twelve or thirteen. What is now common was once thought a prodigy in the development of mind. . . . I will only remark that I have known a child at nine years of age better acquainted with the doctrines of religion than two thirds of our church members, and that I have been well acquainted with at least one case of conversion between five and six years of age."

Says Mr. Spurgeon (this was written some years ago, but we know, from recent utterances, that his sentiments have not changed on this subject), "I have, during the last year, received forty or fifty children into church membership. Among those I have had at any time to exclude from the church, out of a church of twenty-seven hundred members, I have never had to exclude a single one who was received whilst yet a child. Teachers and superintendents should not merely believe in the *possibility* of early conversion, but in the *frequency* of it."

Says Dr. Stephen H. Tyng, "I solemnly believe in the conversion of children. I cannot say how young they may be brought to make an open profession of their faith and love for Christ, but I have seen as manifest evidences of the new birth in children of six and eight years of age as I have ever seen in an adult. Shall I turn back those whom God Himself hath brought? Shall I refuse those whom God Himself has accepted? Never! We are in an age when the church is to take the children, nurse them, train

them, educate them, protect them, and prepare them for the work appointed for them; and under no circumstances to repel from the highest form of a Christian profession the child that can give a fair account of the faith of its little heart in a divine Saviour, and manifest clearly and continuously the power of the love of Jesus shed abroad in that heart by the Holy Spirit."

But the church does not need to go to ancient history or to modern divines for encouragement or countenance in this work; for the sanctified common-sense of its united membership tells it that if the children of to-day are secured for the church, the church of the future is secure.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

Its Origin. — Its Constitution. — Its Objects: To promote constant Confession of Christ, and earnest Christian Endeavor. — Its Spirit: The Spirit of Aggressive, Spiritual, Evangelical Christianity. — Its Rules: Are they too strict?

With these Biblical examples, these adaptations of child life to the Christian life, these needs of the church and encouragements to labor for the conversion of the young in mind, the practical question arises, "What shall be done?" It is easy to suggest defects, to deplore evils, to say things should be different; the more difficult matter is to devise some practical remedy. What is needed is evidently some well-defined plan of work, which shall awaken the susceptible minds of children to the need of salvation, and shall train them patiently and unweariedly, day by day and week by week, for Christian usefulness, thus making early church membership natural and safe. Such an agency the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor is designed to be, and has proved itself to be in many cases. It was begun in feebleness and self-distrust, and its promoters have endeavored simply to follow the Divine leading and the dictates of common-sense. The animus and pur-

pose of this organization cannot better be shown than by relating the way in which it originated.

Some personal allusions will be excused, perhaps, in this brief recital.

In the winter of 1880–81, in connection with some Sunday-school prayer meetings, quite a large number of boys and girls of my congregation seemed hopefully converted. Their ages ranged from ten to eighteen, most of them being over fourteen years old. They were bright, earnest, natural young Christians, with all the faults and all the virtues and promise of ordinary boys and girls.

The questions became serious ones, How shall this band be trained, how shall they be set to work, how shall they be fitted for church membership? Is it safe, with only the present agencies at work, to admit them to church membership? These questions were pressing for an immediate answer, for a few months of inaction and sloth might blast many of these budding Christian characters. Stimulated and guided by an article of Dr. Cuyler's concerning a young people's association in his church, I asked the young Christians to my house to consider the formation of a society for Christian work. They responded in large numbers; and after talking the matter over, finding them willing and eager to enter upon active religious duties, we formed a Society of Christian Endeavor of some sixty members, all of whom signed their names to the stringent rules of the constitution, after having them fully explained, and apparently with an understanding of their purport. Thus

it will be seen that this movement originated in an hour of practical necessity and to meet a felt need; and it has been, we think, from the beginning, a humble, tentative, flexible effort to train young Christians for usefulness and service in the church of God. No one has had a hobby to ride. No preconceived plan has been rigidly adhered to. No assumption of wisdom or infallibility has been indulged in. It has not been claimed that this is the only way or the best way to train young Christians; only that it is one way which has received some signal marks of the Divine approval. Perhaps an adequate idea of the purpose and object of the society can best be derived from the constitution, which is substantially the same as the one that evening adopted, and which we here submit.

CONSTITUTION

OF THE

Williston Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor,

PORTLAND, ME.

CONSTITUTION.

NAME.

This society shall be called the WILLISTON YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

OBJECT.

Its object shall be to promote an earnest Christian life among its members, to increase their mutual acquaintance, and to make them more useful in the service of God.

MEMBERSHIP.

The members shall consist of two classes, Active and Associate.

Active Members. — The Active members of this society shall consist of all young people who sincerely desire to accomplish the results above specified. They shall become members upon being elected by the society, and upon signing their names to the book, thereby agreeing to live up to the requirements of the Constitution.

Associate Members. — Any young person who is not at present willing to be considered a decided Christian may join this society as an Associate member. Such a one shall have the privileges of the society, and shall have the special prayers and sympathy of the Active members, but shall be excused from taking part in the prayer meetings. It is hoped and expected that all Associate members will in time become Active members, and the society will work and pray for this end.

The Lookout Committee shall, by personal interview, satisfy themselves of the fitness of young persons to become members of this society, and shall propose their names at least one week before their election by the society.

OFFICERS.

The officers of this society shall be a President, Vice-President, and Secretary, whose duties shall be those which usually fall to such officers.

There shall also be a Prayer-Meeting Committee, a Lookout Committee, a Social Committee, a Missionary Committee, a Sunday-School Committee, a Relief Committee, and a Flower Committee, each consisting of five members.

DUTIES OF OFFICERS.

The duties of the President, Vice-President, and Secretary shall be those that usually fall to such officers.

THE PRAYER-MEETING COMMITTEE.

This committee shall have in charge the Friday-evening prayer meeting, shall see that a topic is assigned, and a leader provided for each meeting.

THE LOOKOUT COMMITTEE.

It shall be the duty of the Lookout Committee to bring new members into the society, to introduce them to the work, and to the other members, and to affectionately look after and reclaim any that seem to be indifferent to their duties.

THE SOCIAL COMMITTEE.

It shall be the duty of the Social Committee to provide for the mutual acquaintance of the members by occasional sociables, for which any entertainment that may be desired may be provided.

THE MISSIONARY COMMITTEE.

It shall be the duty of the Missionary Committee to raise money for benevolent objects by voluntary contributions or by entertainments, to distribute the same according to their best judgment, and to account for all money thus raised to the society. A sum not exceeding one fourth of all the money thus raised may, if deemed necessary, be used for the current expenses of the society. It shall be the duty of this committee also to provide for an occasional missionary meeting, and to interest the members of the society, in all ways, in missionary topics.

THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL COMMITTEE.

It shall be the duty of this committee to endeavor to bring into our Sunday school those who do not attend elsewhere, and to co-operate with the superintendent and officers of the school in any ways which they may suggest for the benefit of the Sunday school.

THE RELIEF COMMITTEE.

It shall be the duty of this committee to seek out cases of sickness and suffering among the members of the society, to bring them to the notice of the other members, and, so far as possible, to relieve those who may be in want.

THE FLOWER COMMITTEE.

It shall be the duty of this committee to provide flowers for the pulpit on Sunday, whenever practicable, and afterward to distribute the same to the sick, whenever it may be possible to do so.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES.

Each committee shall make a report to the society at the monthly business meeting, concerning the work of the past month.

BUSINESS MEETINGS AND ELECTIONS.

Business meetings can be held at the close of the Friday-evening meeting, or at any other time, in accordance with the call of the President. An election of officers and committees shall be held once in six months. Names may be proposed by a Nominating Committee appointed by the President.

THE PRAYER MEETING.

It is expected that all the Active members of this society will be present at every meeting unless detained by some absolute necessity, and that each one will take some part, however slight, in every meeting. The meetings shall be held just one hour; and, at the close, some time may be taken for introduction and social intercourse, if desired. *Once each month an experience meeting shall be held, at which each member shall speak concerning his progress in the Christian life for the past month.* If any one chooses, he can express his feelings by an appropriate verse of Scripture. *It is expected that if any one is obliged to be absent from this experience meeting, he will send the reason for such absence by some one who attends.*

At the close of the monthly experience meeting, the roll shall be called, and the response of the Active members who are present shall be considered a renewed expression of allegiance to Christ; and if any member of the society is absent from the monthly experience meeting, and fails to send an excuse, the Lookout Committee is expected to take the name of such a one, and in a kindly and brotherly spirit ascertain the reason of the absence. *If any member of this society is absent and unexcused from three consecutive experience meetings, such a one ceases to be a member of the society, and his name shall be stricken from the list of members.*

MISCELLANEOUS.

Any other committees may be added and duties assumed by this society which may in the future seem best.

This Constitution can be amended by a two-thirds vote of the society, provided that notice of such amendment is given in writing, and recorded by the Secretary, at least one week before the amendment is acted upon.

It will be seen from this Constitution that the sole purpose of this organization is to promote, in every way possible, the *religious* life of its members. It is not a literary society, although if it is thought best in any particular instance to promote the attractiveness of the society, one evening of the week may be set apart for literary exercises under its auspices, provided these exercises in no way interfere with the religious life of the members. It is not a social club for young people, although once each month, at least, there should be a social gathering where the boys and girls may be assured of a good time; but this is for the sole purpose of making the distinctively and avowedly religious aims of the society more attrac-

tive. In short, the sole object of the organization is to make religion, child religion, a natural, rational, permanent part of the child's life; to make the Lord Jesus Christ to appear the children's friend, and His active, acknowledged service something to be entered into and enjoyed by all young persons as heartily, zealously, and constantly as their studies and their games.

To be more specific, what in detail are the objects of this society?

First, it will be seen that one great object of the organization is to provide a natural and pleasant channel through which young people and even little children may every week acknowledge Christ.

Active membership implies, according to the constitution, that one is trying to be a Christian, and every one that joins it promises and expects to perform a Christian's duty. The very act of joining, where the rules are strictly lived up to, is a confession of allegiance to Christ.

In the second place, some such agency as this gives the young people something to do; and as every pastor knows, nothing stimulates the budding activity of the Christian like having some means of expending his energies.

In the third place, another great object of this society is to give the pastor and older Christian friends of the young people an opportunity of knowing constantly their religious status. No one who belongs to this society need ever drift away from the anchorage of a religious hope without the fact being very soon known

to older friends, who can hope by wise and loving counsels to bring back the wanderer to his old mooring.

A fourth object of this society is to form a stepping-stone to church membership; or, to vary the figure, *to make a temporary shelter, into which the young convert may be immediately received and kept in comparative safety from the roaring lion, until the church is willing to receive him into its fold.*

A fifth object of this association is to increase the efficiency of its members for future service in the church of Christ.

We will not enlarge upon these five objects of the society, since we shall have something further to say upon this subject in another connection and in the next chapter, but will proceed to say a word about its spirit. Its whole spirit and tendency, so far as we have been able to ascertain, is directly in the line of aggressive, evangelical, spiritual Christianity. It does not assume that the child is an angel by nature, who only needs a little coddling and encouragement in order to find its wings. It assumes that the child needs to be converted as much as the older person; that while his sense of sin may not be as deep or his rapture at deliverance from sin as fervid, that yet there is an experience of conversion as appropriate to the child as to his father. It assumes that the conversion of a child is as much the work of the Spirit of God as the conversion of the oldest sinner; and yet, while this is true, it seems possible, owing to the superior susceptibility and innocence

of the child's nature, in the same time and with the same human efforts to lead ten children to Christ where one adult is brought to him. This society seeks evidence of the child's true conversion, and to promote his growth in grace. In principle and practice this organization honors the church ; places it at the head of all agencies, as the divinely appointed one for the evangelization of the world, and endeavors to work, in a modest way, as its humble assistant among the young. Such, in a few words, seems to us to be the spirit of this organization.

As to its Rules. — These rules are strict, and are meant to be strict. They provide that only those who give good evidence of conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ shall be active members of the society. The associate members, too, while Christian character is not required of them, do, thereby, in becoming associate members, put themselves directly under religious influences, and by the very terms of the constitution indicate that they are willing to have the prayers of the active members especially offered for them. The committees are held strictly to their respective labors, for each one is expected to report once each month as to the duties performed during the past four weeks. But the peculiarity, and, to a large extent the efficiency, of this society depends upon its prayer-meeting rules and their observance.

Let us repeat this section of the constitution relating to the prayer meeting with emphasis, for in proportion as these rules are enforced and lived up to will this organization be of real value.

The Prayer Meeting. — *It is expected that all the active members of this society will be present at every meeting, unless detained by some absolute necessity, and that each one will take some part, however slight, in every meeting.* The meetings shall be held just one hour, and at the close some time may be taken for introduction and social intercourse, if desired. *Once each month an experience meeting shall be held, at which each member shall speak concerning his progress in the Christian life for the past month.* If any one chooses, he can express his feelings by an appropriate verse of Scripture. *It is expected that if any one is obliged to be absent from this experience meeting, he will send the reason for such absence by some one who attends.*

If any member of the society is absent from the monthly experience meetings, and fails to send an excuse, the Lookout Committee is expected to take the name of such a one, and, in a kindly and brotherly spirit, ascertain the reason of the absence. If any member of this society is absent and unexcused from three consecutive experience meetings, such a one ceases to be a member of the society, and his name shall be stricken from the list of members.

This is a voluntary society. No young person who fears these rules or disapproves of them need subscribe to them. But if he does join, and voluntarily accepts and signs this constitution, he can be held to its rules. He has then himself agreed to attend every meeting; and, if he is habitually or frequently absent without excuse, the Lookout Com-

mittee has a right to find out the reason for such absence.

Once a month, with more than usual strictness, the rules require every member to be present, and the roll is called to find if any are absent without excuse. Those who are then absent from the monthly experience meeting are interviewed by the Lookout Committee before the next meeting, and it is found that when this precaution is taken, the same ones are rarely absent from two consecutive monthly meetings; while if they are absent from three in succession, and take no pains to ask for an excuse, the evidence is quite conclusive that such no longer deserve to be reckoned as active members, and their names are dropped from the roll. The society is thus continually self-weeded, and cannot contain for any great length of time many who are not genuine Christians. All are expected, too, as we have seen, to take some part in every meeting, and voluntarily agree, when they join the society, at least to repeat a verse in the weekly meeting.

This is the principal and distinguishing rule of the organization, and we may be pardoned for referring to it again, and for dwelling upon it at some length, since it marks the difference between this and other societies of the kind, and would frequently, we think make all the difference between a real, live young people's meeting and the old young people's meetings or young old people's meetings which exist in so many churches.

The rules require, too, that the Prayer-Meeting

Committee shall see that topics and leaders are provided for every meeting; that the Social Committee shall furnish games, readings, music, etc., for a monthly sociable; and that the Lookout Committee, most important of all, shall, as before hinted, not only find new members for the society, and decide upon their fitness to join, but shall also keep a watchful eye on every member who has signed the constitution, to see that each one lives up to his voluntarily assumed religious duties.

"Are not these rules too strict?" we hear some one say. In fact, a great many persons have written us to this effect, — that in their churches it would never do to have such stringent, iron-clad rules for the prayer meeting, requiring attendance and participation. But why not? If a young person is a Christian, is it pledging himself to endure too much hardness as a good soldier to attend a prayer meeting once a week, when not absolutely prevented, and to take some slight part in every meeting? Is not the church too lax in its requirements of its converts? Does it not expect too little of them? There is no room for the spirit of heroism of old, except in the faithfulness and zeal with which these little duties are performed: shall we not, then, expect and demand that these Christian duties shall be performed by the young convert, even at the risk of personal discomfort and at the sacrifice of personal ease?

Have they any right to be called the followers of Christ, to say nothing of being the spiritual descendants of Paul and Peter and Polycarp and Lati-

mer and Huss and Luther, unless they are willing to pledge themselves to these "iron-clad rules"? Again, unless some such rules are adopted and adhered to, we think any society of this kind has a very poor chance for a long or vigorous life. The prayer meeting is not only the pulse and the thermometer of such an organization, it is, in some sense, the life-blood itself; and when it dies or flags, the society dies or flags. So long, then, as it is the generally expected thing for all the members to take part in every meeting, it will be comparatively easy for each one to take some part; but when it is not expected or required, some excuse will occur every week to the great majority of young Christians why *they* should not take part in that particular meeting, and very soon it will be left to the ready-tongued or the peculiarly conscientious, until at last it will degenerate into a meeting engaged in by few and interesting to none. Still, though something is required from each, a very little is accepted as fulfilling the requirements: the simplest word, the shortest verse of Scripture, is considered sufficient; and a mere request to be excused from attendance from the experience meeting, showing that the absent member thought of the meeting and considered himself bound by the regulations, is always granted. It is not difficult for the youngest Christian, who is truly in earnest, to fulfil all the duties which he voluntarily assumes. The dangers which may be apprehended from this constant, compulsory, oral confession of Christ will be treated in another chapter.

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

How it fits Children for Church Membership. — A Half-Way House to the Church. — A Training School within the Church. — A Watch-Tower for the Church.

We have already related how this society seeks the Christian nurture of the young people who voluntarily join its ranks. Let us attempt to explain how it seeks to make church membership safe and useful for the youngest Christians who come under its influences.

In the first place, it is a *half-way house to the church.* There is always a dangerous interval between the conversion of the child and his reception into the church. In fact, to the older Christian, this interval is always attended with peril. As some one has expressed it, "The devil almost always has a severe tussle with the Christian before he lets him join God's earthly people." But with young people this period is bristling with dangers. Children usually are obliged to wait longer than grown people to prove their discipleship, before being received into full communion by the people of God. Sometimes they may be put off months or years before the con-

servative church committee will consider them suitable candidates. Sometimes their parents may restrain them, from mistaken notions of what the Christian life demands of a child, or of what church membership involves. Very often, if left to themselves, the terrors of the "examination" and the shrinking from public appearance would overcome the desire of the young disciple to acknowledge his Master before the world. The longer he is restrained by any of these causes, the harder it becomes for him to take this important step, the less necessary it seems to him month by month; and at last, with hardened conscience and calloused sensibilities, he decides to remain out of the church, which at first he desired to join. The child Christian who, without special methods of religious training, spends the first year of his new life outside of the church, is in very great danger of never joining the church.

There are thousands of men and women — one meets them everywhere — who will tell you that, when they were young, they were convicted of sin, and, as they thought, gave their hearts to the Saviour, but no one encouraged them to go any farther, the church door was practically barred to them, they drifted farther and farther away from it, they became careless and indifferent, and their early love for the Saviour became only a pleasing childish dream.

Now, what can we do for these lambs of the flock? Shall we condemn them to stay outside of the fold for three, six, or twelve months, the very months when they most need shelter and warmth, without

making any provision for their remaining near the fold, so that they may enter when its doors are opened? Has there not been a fatal gap, right here, in too many cases, between conversion and church membership?

To bridge this gap, to form a half-way house to the church, is one object of this society. Into its membership the child Christian can be at once received, as soon as he gives to the Lookout Committee credible evidence of conversion to Christ. To seek and gain admission to this society, in which are so many of his own age, is no dreaded ordeal. By joining it he confesses to a limited circle that he has a Christian's hope, and thus makes the supreme confession, which joining the church implies, easy and natural and almost certain. At the same time, it should be plainly impressed upon the young Christian that this society is not the goal; that it is only a half-way house, only a temporary shelter; and that, as soon as church committee and parents think it safe to receive him, he is to stand up before the great congregation and take upon him the vows of God's people.

In the second place, *the Society of Christian Endeavor is a training school within the church.* It is not intended that the young Christian should cease to be a member of this society as soon as he becomes a member of the church. In fact, his chief usefulness in the society then begins; for he feels an added responsibility, and knows that he is looked upon by others as one who has taken double vows

of allegiance to Christ, and is regarded more as an example by still younger Christians who are not yet church members. Every week the evening comes when he must, in some brief way, renew his allegiance to Christ. The interests of the society, he feels, as well as his own growth in the Christian life, depend upon his faithfulness; and the feeling of responsibility and usefulness in his Lord's service develops his Christian life as nothing else can do. Perhaps the trembling young disciple *begins* by repeating in his weekly meeting a verse of Scripture, for at least as much as this is required of every one; this accustoms him to the sound of his own voice, and soon he is able to add to his Scripture verse a word or two of his own. There are many in the society who have no more experience than himself, and whose words are just as stumbling as his own, so he has courage to persevere. Since something is expected and required of all, it soon becomes the customary thing to take part in meeting, and what is customary and usual soon loses its terrors. By and by the leader of the meeting calls on him to offer prayer, or else of his own accord he engages in his first, halting, public prayer, and gradually develops into one of the leaders and supporters of the meetings. His pastor will find, too, that his usefulness is not confined to the young people's meeting, but that at the regular church prayer meetings he is present, and ready for any work he is called upon to do. At least this has been the experience of many pastors; and boys who have had but a few

months' training in the Society of Christian Endeavor have developed into earnest, faithful workers in all departments of prayer-meeting effort.

The meetings of this society should be led, not by the pastor or deacons of the church, but by the members of the society. Even the youngest boy can sit in the leader's chair, give out the hymns, and read the Scripture lesson for the evening; and his very youth and inexperience will lead the others to be more prompt in coming to his assistance, and in promoting "a good meeting." This training is invaluable in giving confidence, and willingness to undertake similar duties in the future.

But not only in the prayer meeting does this society serve as a training school for the church. Many of its officers should be from the ranks of its younger membership. Perhaps the president should be one of the *maturer* young men, and one or two on each of the committee should have the best judgment and the largest experience attainable, but other members may be from the ranks of the younger and newer Christians. Thus, if the officers and committees are changed once or twice a year, all in course of time will have a chance to become acquainted with committee work, with parliamentary usages, and with the routine duties which many will assume in their future church life. Nor is this all. It should be impressed upon each boy and girl that their duties as Christians are not confined to the prayer meeting and the sociable; that they have words to speak in private, and prayer to offer for

their companions who are not yet Christians. Many will be surprised to find how readily a boy can reach a boy's heart; how easily a girl, with the missionary spirit, can diffuse it around her, until other girls catch the glow of her zeal. This hand-to-hand, evangelistic work the young people will enter into, if rightly guided and encouraged, and the lessons it will teach them will never be forgotten. We have used the masculine pronoun in these pages, but the feminine might be substituted for it just as well.

All this work may be done by girls and young ladies as well as by boys and young men, and they may become aids to the prayer meeting and to all other branches of church work as well as their brethren, through the means of this training school.

In the third place, the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor is a watch-tower for the church. Through this agency the church may know the religious status of each one of its young people. The pastor and some few of the prominent church members, who are in peculiar sympathy with the movement and with young life in general, should attend all the meetings, not for the purpose of using much of the time or of taking a prominent part in the meeting, but for the sake of seeing how the young people get on.

The requirement of the constitution which demands participation in the monthly experience meeting is a great help in this direction; for thus, at least once a month, the pastor can hear his young Christians commit themselves anew to their Saviour, and, if they

are derelict to this self-imposed duty, he can find out the cause of their unfaithfulness. The Lookout Committee may be of very great assistance to the pastor in this direction, keeping him posted concerning those they call upon in the performance of their duties, and giving him the clew to the religious life of many of the boys and girls, of which he would otherwise know but little.

Thus the growth in grace of each one of the young Christians may be watched and fostered; and no one can slip away from the outward performance of duties, which usually precedes or accompanies inward unfaithfulness, without the fact becoming known to some of the older Christians of the church. To speak from personal experience and in the first person once more, I feel in a certain sense as though I stood with my hand on the shoulder of each of the one hundred and fifty active members of the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor in our own church, and that no one of them can escape that friendly grasp without my knowledge. In other words, I know something of the religious life of each of these young people, and learn a little more about it every week, which is a great deal more than I can say of the majority of the older members of the church Thus does this society prove to be a watch-tower for the pastor and older members of the church, as well as a training school within the church and a half-way house to the church.

One of the most essential factors in this society is the Lookout Committee, as we have elsewhere

intimated. If this committee does its work faithfully and wisely, there is little danger that the rules will not be observed, or that there will be disastrous failure in any department of the work. This committee can do very much to make the society a true half-way house, fitting school, and watch-tower for the church.

In view of the great importance of this branch of the organization, we append some hints concerning the labors of this committee, furnished by one who for many months has been the chairman of such a committee, and who has proved exceptionally efficient and successful in carrying on this work.

The Lookout Committee Work.

"While each committee has its own peculiar work, and distinct responsibility for the Society of Christian Endeavor, a considerable part of the real work devolves upon this committee; and the name itself, 'The Lookout Committee,' suggests what the work is. First, its work is to look out for and bring new members into the society. It may do this looking out in many ways. One way is to be watchful and note those who attend the meetings; to give strangers a cordial greeting and learn if they are followers of our Master, and if they would not like to join us as workers in our band. In any event it should look out that they do not long feel as strangers. Then there are many young people who do not attend any prayer meeting, and who know but little of Christian living. Surely this committee should seek for such

as these, and try to bring them in where they may learn of their Saviour, and to help them to begin to serve God. It should particularly look out for new members in the Sunday schools. Here are the boys and girls who, week by week, are learning out of God's word how to love and trust in their Saviour. These should be encouraged to come into the Society of Christian Endeavor, and acknowledge the Lord whom they love. If every Sunday-school teacher would heartily co-operate with this committee, a much better work could be done than would be possible for it to accomplish otherwise. Among the associate members in the society, too, this committee should look for active members. These are members who have not yet decided to follow Christ. It should strive for these who are so near; strive prayerfully, with many earnest invitations. This is the home work, which should be done with patience; kindly, quietly, and zealously. Its labors should not cease until all are brought in as active members who shall be helpful in the society and useful in God's service. If the chairman of the committee has this matter, the bringing in of new members, in hand, and the work be done systematically, the future work will be greatly facilitated. Once each month, at least, the committee, after having decided that all are proper persons to be admitted into the society, should present the list of the names of those desiring to join, to be voted upon. In introducing the new members, effort should be made to give to each some work that will attach responsibility to their position, and which

may help them to live up to their agreement, and make them truly useful in the service of God. The work of this committee is also to look after its own members. This looking out necessitates the personal acquaintance of the Lookout Committee with each member. That acquaintance may be begun when the member is brought into the society, but should not end here. Let friendly calls be made upon all the members. If the committee keep a list of the names of the members, there can be some system for doing this part of the work, so that each person may not receive one, but many calls. It is in the homes that the pleasant words may be spoken which may help to promote an interest in the daily living for Christ, and make stronger the desire to serve the Lord Jesus in all things; and the kind word fitly spoken, wherever we may meet one of our number, on the street, at the place of business, or in the social gathering, has its part, and it is no small one, in this work. The result of this looking out for opportunities to be helpful, and then using them, none can know. But, after all the planning, it is only the hearts which are truly consecrated to the Master's work, and that are bound up in this work for the young, that will know how to do this work of love. 'Be instant in season, out of season,' would make a good watchword for the committee. This committee has also to look after any who may seem to be indifferent to their duties. Yet, if it earnestly looks out for all its members, as has been suggested, there will be few of these. There may be some who

do not often attend the meetings, and who are never heard from. It is the duty of the committee to see such, and, if possible, ascertain the reason of their delinquency; and, if excusable, explain the case before the society. If they are really indifferent, it ought, in a kind and affectionate manner, to strive to arouse them to a greater interest in Christian living, and, reminding them of the rules of the society, to make them more earnest in living up to their agreement. This committee should be wide awake and watchful, and, by the timely, encouraging word, strive to keep all interested in the society, and to prevent any from falling out by the wayside. If this be a thoughtful, faithful, and prayerful committee, its opportunities are unbounded to work for Christ and to promote the welfare of the young."

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

QUESTIONS ANSWERED. — How can the Society be started? — What Age Limit shall be imposed? — Is this Plan fitted for Small, Weak Churches? — What does "Absolute Necessity" mean? — How should an Experience Meeting be conducted? — Why should the Roll be called at its Close? — What other Work may be attempted? — How shall the Indifferent be dealt with?

SUGGESTIONS. — Care in admitting Members. — Strict Adherence to the Rules. — Constant Vigilance needed. — The Pastor's Place in this Work an Essential Place.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED. — That the Society will detract from the Pre-eminence of the Church. — That it will interfere with the Church Prayer Meeting. — That it will foster a Brazen, Wordy Type of Piety.

A GREAT many questions of a practical nature concerning the workings of this society have come to us from correspondents in all parts of the country. Let us try to answer some of these questions in this chapter.

"How can I start such a society?" is the question that often comes.

"There is no particular interest among the young people of our congregation, and I should be afraid

that the attempt would lack support, and fall flat from the very beginning," say many.

It is unquestionably much better to begin such a movement during a time of revived religious interest among the young. This revival interest gives every such work an impetus which it can gain in no other way, and this impetus and headway may be maintained with comparative ease when the society is fully established. We would begin with a prayer meeting especially for the young. Let the pastor invite all the boys and girls, who desire to attend such a meeting, to remain for a few minutes after Sunday school some Sabbath. He will be surprised oftentimes, we think, to see how many will respond. Then, with the help of a few judicious, young-hearted teachers, let him try to point these boys and girls, who show enough interest to attend this meeting, to the Lord Jesus Christ. After a few, earnest, winning words from himself and others, perhaps he will think it best to ask those who wish to remain for personal, religious conversation to do so. Again we think the pastor will be surprised (we are speaking from experience in this matter) to find how many children are willing at least to talk with him on this subject. By this personal conversation, repeated for a few weeks in succession, and especially with the help of wise and faithful teachers in their own classes, he can soon winnow the sincere and earnest young disciples from their thought less and indifferent companions, and can, before many weeks, form them into a Society of Christian

Endeavor, in which there should, if possible, be a few of the older young people of the church. This little band will grow, as the plan for Christian nurture becomes better known and more popular, until it will become a powerful auxiliary for good. But even when there is no religious interest among the children, and no means of awakening such an interest (a very rare and exceptional state of affairs), such a society may still be started, if there are only two or three young people who are willing to subscribe to the iron-clad rules of the constitution, and meet together once a week for Christian helpfulness. Their meetings will always be interesting, even if they last for only twenty minutes; and their numbers, we think, will soon increase, if only the charter members are faithful and zealous.

"Is this plan fitted for small, weak churches, where there are only a few young people?"

We think so; for the only condition of success is that those who do belong, be they few or many, be true to their pledge and persistent in their efforts to bring others into the Christian life.

"What should be the limits of age in this society?"

This is a question which will very largely answer itself in practice. The very young, those under nine or ten, cannot well attend the evening meetings, and so cannot join a society which pledges such attendance; and middle-aged and elderly church members will doubtless feel, for the most part, that their sphere of usefulness is in the regular church prayer meetings, and, while aiding the young people in

every way in their power, will not wish to take up very much of their weekly prayer-meeting hour. Earnest, Christian young men and women, however, from eighteen to thirty years of age, are a very valuable element, for the society needs the maturer judgment and assistance of these in many ways.

"Will young men and women of twenty-one or over unite with children of ten or twelve in this work?"

Generally, we think, there will be little practical trouble on this score. The older ones will soon see that they are very useful to the younger ones, and that a large field of Christian effort lies in this direction. As the work progresses, they will doubtless become more and more engaged in it; while the younger ones, feeling that they too have a share in the management of the organization, will be easily led and guided by those who have had more experience.

We have found it wise sometimes to assign, in a quiet way, some particular younger boys to each of the older ones to look after and help.

"Is it best to have both sexes in the same society?"

By all means, we should say. Each helps the other. Some kinds of committee work, girls and young ladies can do far better than the boys; while some of the offices can best be filled by young men.

"What does the phrase 'unless prevented by an absolute necessity,' in the prayer-meeting clause of the constitution, mean?"

Just what it says. Of course it must be inter-

preted by the individual conscience to a greater or less extent, but it is intended to exclude all slight and frivolous excuses for non-attendance, and to make attendance really obligatory upon those who willingly enter into this agreement. Absence from town, sickness, prohibition of parents, of course, make absence "absolutely necessary"; but the presence of company, a fascinating novel, childish disinclination or freaks of any kind, should not be allowed to keep the young Christian from his religious duties.

"How should the experience meeting be conducted?"

Like any other, except that all who take part in it should be so brief as to give every other member a chance to speak, which indeed is a good rule for any prayer meeting. This "experience meeting" has often been misapprehended, we think. It has received this name for lack of a better. Perhaps "consecration meeting" or "commitment meeting" would more accurately describe it. The idea is that once each month every young person shall publicly reconsecrate himself to God, in some simple, appropriate way; perhaps by merely repeating a verse of Scripture that expresses his feelings, perhaps by saying, "I am trying to serve Jesus," "I hope I am a Christian," "I have been trying to live a Christian life during the past month," or "I hope to serve my Master better during the month to come."

Such expressions are frequently heard in the experience meetings, and answer every requirement

and expectation. As the young disciple grows older and stronger, he may have more to relate concerning his past experience; but it is not required. No well-rounded Christian experience is expected from month to month; the simplest, most childlike expression of allegiance to the child's Saviour is alone demanded. The importance of such a frequently renewed consecration to the young disciple, during the formative years of his Christian life, cannot be overestimated.

"What is the use of calling the roll at the close of the monthly experience meeting, as is the practice in some societies?"

One reason is to find out who is absent without excuse. In a large society no other method could be adopted, and the Lookout Committee would not know whom to approach with the word of warning or reproof. Another great object is that the answering to the roll may be a recommitment of the young disciple to his Saviour. He should be taught when he answers "present," and confesses thus that he is an active member of the society, and under obligations to obey its rules, that he, at the same time, confesses that he is a follower of Christ, and wishes to be numbered among His people.

Thus the calling over of the names is far more than the reading of a muster roll: it gives to every one a new opportunity for confessing Christ once each month.

"What other work can be undertaken by such a society besides the prayer-meeting work?"

Committees of various kinds may be raised, according to the need of different churches. There may be a Flower Committee, to provide flowers for the pulpit each Sunday; a Relief Committee, to look after such children and young people as are sick or poor, and may need aid; a Sunday-School Committee, to bring into the Sunday school, children who do not attend any other school; and a Missionary Committee, to raise funds from among the members by voluntary contributions for missionary objects. In fact, these branches of work may be almost indefinitely enlarged, according to the judgment of each pastor and local society.

"How can members who grow lax and careless be kept up to a steady performance of their duties?"

The Lookout Committee, if rightly constituted, is very useful in this work. The fact that the members know they will be looked after, if they forget their obligations, is a great restraint and safeguard. If any stray away, a kind word often recalls them to their duties; while, if the unfaithfulness is wilful and prolonged, there is nothing left but dishonorable dismission, which shall relieve the society of further responsibility for the delinquents. Those who have acquired a real distaste for a Christian's duties will no doubt avail themselves of the back door out of the society, and, by absenting themselves from three consecutive experience meetings, will thus exclude themselves from it; but such cases will not, we think, be frequent.

One or two cautions seem to be necessary at

this point. In the first place, care should be taken to admit only Christian young people to active membership.

While the idea is new and enthusiasm runs high, a great many of the younger ones may desire to enroll themselves as members, without really understanding the object or rules of the society. This should not be allowed. The Lookout Committee should take pains to find out that every one who is proposed for membership gives credible evidence — the evidence that a child or youth should be expected to give — of conversion; and that he understands and is willing to live up to the strict requirements of the constitution.

Of course, with the utmost watchfulness, some may be received who really do not belong in this fold of young Christians; but the number will be comparatively small, and will have no disturbing effect upon the religious zeal of the others. Again, especial pains should be taken that the rules shall in no instance become dead letters. This idea has been alluded to in a preceding chapter; but, for the sake of emphasis, we desire to mention it in this place. These rules are not meant for show upon paper, but for the actual guidance of the lives of those who subscribe to them.

There is nothing in any one of them that should be considered impossible or even onerous by the hearty young Christian. Then they should be observed. The great danger to be contended with is this danger of laxity. It is so foreign to the

expectations of our older church members that *every one* should bear some share of the burden of *every meeting*, that it is thought quite preposterous to expect this of mere children; and so, little by little, a few are in danger of finding the meetings in their own hands, and the design of the society, as a training school for the youngest and for every one, is frustrated. But it will not be impossible, as experience has proved, to make these rules effective, if those who have charge of the interests of the society are true to their trusts, and are willing to take the necessary pains to enforce them. Soon it will become the popular and the expected thing to attend all the meetings and to support them. The force of habit, and the *esprit de corps* among the members, will come to the aid of pastor and teachers, and a new generation of Christians will come up with whom prayer-meeting work is neither spasmodic nor sporadic, but a regular, accepted part of daily duty.

Another suggestion is that this society will not take care of itself. The young people must be guided, encouraged, watched, and sympathized with constantly. This is no patent process for turning out young Christians without any labor on the part of pastor or older friends. Constant vigilance and oversight are required. The great merit, as it seems to us, is that this organization makes this oversight practicable and effective. This society accomplishes nothing unless live men who love the young, whom Christ blessed and for whom He died, are behind it, and are willing to be very busy in His service. Nor

does this agency supersede or render unnecessary other forms of work for the young. It in no way takes the place of Sunday school work; it relieves the pastor of no private duties toward the young of his flock; it does not take the place of pastor's classes for the catechetical instruction of the boys and girls; in fact, in connection with the work of this society, it has been our custom for several years to have a "pastor's class" meeting in the afternoon, for instruction in the church creed, and the doctrines of evangelical religion. This class and the weekly meetings of the society have been mutually helpful, one to the other.

It has been said that there is not sufficient room for the pastor's influence in this work. On the other hand, this organization gives a great many additional levers to the pastor, which he may use, if he will, most effectively. To be sure, his name may not appear among the list of officers, he may not take charge of the prayer meetings; but he should always be present, and his should be the unseen hand which guides every movement.

There are various regulations which may be wisely adopted by different societies according to local needs. For instance, while it is best that the subject of the prayer meetings should always be known by all in advance, it may be sometimes best to print the subjects for some weeks ahead, at other times to announce them each week for the next, and at other times to post a written list in the vestibule of the vestry, to be chosen from when no better subjects

present themselves. Another suggestion, which comes from a correspondent, is that all the young people be encouraged to keep a memorandum book in which they shall put down prayer-meeting topics, thoughts to be presented at the next meeting, lists of those to be remembered in prayer, and other helpful notes.

The monthly sociables in our judgment should be confined to the members, active and associate, and to those whom the Social Committee may especially invite; but they should not be opened to any and all. This exclusiveness will prove a stimulus to associate membership, perhaps, and many who would not otherwise do so may put themselves under the influence of the active, praying members of the society, for the sake at first of the good times which the sociables afford. The aim in these sociables should not be too manifestly didactic. Their object is to give all who attend a good time, and to make them feel at home among the Christian young people, and to make them familiar with each other. To accomplish this object, while there should be a fair proportion of music, readings, and literary entertainment, games should not be ignored or frowned upon by the older members.

Objections. — Many objections to this method of work have naturally arisen and have come to our ears. Most of them may be grouped under two heads: First, these young people's societies, it is said, will interfere with the church and detract from its pre eminence. Second, it is thought they will foster a forced, unnatural religious character.

As to the first objection: The only test of this is experience, and as far as our experience goes, it points directly the other way. Our church prayer meetings have been better attended, with a far larger proportion of young people, and with much more active help from them, since the establishment of this society than ever before. At least sixty, whom we could not otherwise have expected to see join the church, have joined within a year and a half, led to Christ and trained for Christ by the influences of this society. There are six organizations of the same kind in Portland, and every one has resulted in awakening a new interest in religious matters among the young, and in bringing many into these churches. The same is true of scores of similar societies, from which we have heard, in various parts of the land.

Some one says, "Bring them all, young and old and middle-aged, into one great prayer meeting, and let us have no classifications of age in the prayer meeting."

Very true, bring them all together; urge this upon them, keep it before them, that, whatever happens, they must never desert any of the regular meetings of their church; but at the same time, if they wish to come together on still another evening, when less embarrassed by the presence of their elders, for mutual help, shall we forbid this, when all their practice will inure directly to the benefit of the church? Can we expect a child Christian to find his voice for the first time when two or three hun-

dred older Christians are listening for his confession? As a practical matter, do we not need some fitting-school for the young convert, and, instead of regarding any such movement as antagonistic to the church, should we not welcome it as a most needed auxiliary?

Another says in this same line of criticism, "I don't believe in anything outside of the church. God appointed the church to accomplish the conversion of the world, and what is outside of the church is wrong in principle and practice."

But in what sense is such an organization outside of the church? No more than the Sunday school, no more than the prayer meeting, are outside of the church. It is carried on by the church and for the church, and for the purpose of bringing children into the church, and of keeping them from falling after they are in the church. Surely nothing could have a more intimate relation with the church than just such an organization.

Another class of objectors take the ground, as we have said, that any such efforts, and especially such meetings as this society contemplates, will cultivate a bold and brazen type of piety; that it will brush the first bloom from the youthful Christian heart: in a word, that it will foster a forced, unnatural, precocious religious experience. The only answer to make to such objectors is the answer of actual experience, "See if it does." We have watched carefully for any budding signs of such unnatural religious precocity, and we have yet to find the first indications of it. And why should we expect this?

Is there not a religious experience as germane to the boy as to the man? Is it not as natural for a Christian boy to speak as a Christian boy, as for a Christian man to speak as a Christian man? We have no doubt that some children could be flattered and cajoled into thinking that they were experienced veterans when they were but babes in Christ, and might put on unbecoming airs in consequence; but the vast majority will be so timid and modest and shrinking that the great problem will be how to bring them out rather than how to repress them in the expression they give to their religious life; and a very few kindly words will be sufficient to check the few too forward ones, if any such are found. Much objection has been made to the experience meeting on this ground. It has been made, however, we think, under a mistaken view of its nature and object. The idea, as we have intimated, is not that each young convert shall once each month present a well-rounded or unique experience, the more startling the better, thus provoking the invention of the boys and girls after a month of ordinary, routine, Christian living. The leading idea is that then each member of the society shall in public renewedly express his determination to serve God. If he chooses to tell what has befallen him in the Christian life, well and good: it is pleasant to hear the young disciples express the joy they have had for four weeks in serving their Saviour; but this is not required, — simply an expressed or implied acknowledgment of Christ's claim upon him. The advan-

tages of frequently bringing the child to commit himself as a Christian before his companions are too obvious to enlarge upon; and we will only add that, so far as we have noticed, — and we have carefully watched for it, — these experience meetings have fostered nothing but the simplest, sweetest, most child-like religion.

We are very far from claiming that this is the only method of Christian nurture, or the best method devisable. We only submit it as one plan which has worked well in many places, as one method which is surely better than no method at all. The exigencies of the times demand an aggressive movement in this direction. Our depleted churches, waiting listlessly for a revival, point in this same direction. The multitudes of young people, going out from Christian homes unsaved, emphasize the same fact, that some new and efficient plan of Christian nurture must be adopted, and that growth from within is as important to the welfare of the church, to say the least, as conquest from without.

CHAPTER VII.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

Further Misapprehensions corrected. — The Object not only to awaken, but to keep awake. — Not to make Children Prominent, but to make them Useful. — Further Questions answered. — "How may Interest in Religious Matters be first aroused?" — The Sunday-School Prayer Meeting. — A Catechetical Class. — This Society not a Labor-Saving Contrivance. — A Flexible Organization. — What has been done. — What may be done.

So many practical questions have come to us since we began the preparation of this little work, that we are constrained to add a chapter to our original plan. And first a word of explanation to those who have misunderstood the animus of this work for the young.

It has been understood in some quarters to be a kind of children's crusade, a revivalistic effort, simply to induce children to pledge themselves to Christ. The task which the Society of Christian Endeavor has set before it is much more difficult than this, and its scope is much broader. It is easy to arouse children's sensibilities. A thrillingly told story will start their emotions. A powerful appeal will awaken their consciences. But what will keep these consciences awake? Who will carefully prune and train and nourish and foster until the little plant becomes

rooted and grounded in Christ? To accomplish this latter and far more important work is the chief object of the society we have described. We have nothing to say against any proper and sensible method of awakening the religious sensibilities of the young, but we have very much to say against dropping them and leaving them unguarded, the moment these sensibilities are awakened.

Many "converts" may be counted where such methods are employed, if the count is taken soon enough after the thrilling appeal is made; the more important question is, how many will answer to their names when the roll of Christ's followers is called after ten or twenty years? Much reproach has been brought upon child-religion and Christian nurture by unwise and injudicious attempts to scare or coax or melt children into a religious mood. Such attempts, if they stop there, are often worse than useless, for the plant of Christian character, instead of being warmed into new life, is often seared and burned, so that it never again easily responds to the vivifying influences of the Sun of Righteousness.

Against a prejudice thus created, are all new plans for Christian nurture obliged to contend; but we desire to have it distinctly understood that the methods we have described contemplate not this sudden, spasmodic, gusty work, but a quiet, watchful, long-continued, patient effort, extending through months and years, to fit children for the church of God on earth and the assemby of the redeemed above. It has been our earnest prayer and hope

that some such agency of Christian nurture, established in our churches, might increase the confidence of older Christians in youthful piety, and might dispel the prejudices which well-meant but unwise methods of revival work among children have created.

Another misapprehension is that this society tends to make children prominent in public, that its prime object is to make a religious stump speaker of every boy or girl whom it can induce to join its ranks. Such an idea is so whimsical and so wide of the mark that it hardly seems worthy of serious answer, but it has been urged, and we wish to free the minds of all our readers of every such idea.

This society contemplates no exhibitions, no display of the talent of its members for religious exhortation. The prayer meetings are quiet gatherings together of young disciples. There cannot well be anything of the public declamation flavor to them; no exhibition of dress, no posturing, no stage effects are possible. What can be more natural or more childlike than the gathering together of young Christians to recite the words of inspiration, or the simple words God has given them to speak to each other. If recitations in public schools and Sabbath schools are not open to this charge, we cannot well see how it can be laid at the door of the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor.

One of the most frequent questions which comes to us is, "How shall we arouse interest enough among our young people to make them willing to start such an organization, and to live up to its stringent rules?"

We have already alluded to the Sunday-school prayer meetings as one solution of this problem; but, owing to the vital importance of this question, we shall be pardoned, perhaps, for dwelling more at length upon this means of making a beginning.

We have published some suggestions upon this point in the *Sunday School Times*, which we take the liberty of reproducing here, in part: —

The Sunday-school prayer meeting should be held directly after the session of the Sunday school, and to them all the boys and girls as well as teachers should be urged to stop.

At these meetings let it be understood that there is to be direct, hand-to-hand work for the salvation of souls; and let the very youngest understand that the object of these meetings is to bring them to the Saviour. Many will go out when Sunday school is done, very likely, but many, also, will remain in response to the invitation; some from curiosity, some because their companions remain, and some because they really desire to be Christians. Let the pastor or superintendent, or some judicious teacher, take charge of the meeting, and in a few direct, forcible words tell the children what it is to be a Christian, that Jesus longs to receive the smallest one, that it is a matter of choice for the child as well as for the man, and that Christianity is best shown by consistent, every-day living for Jesus at home, at school, and on the street.

At the first meeting it may be well to ask all the children who are willing to think the matter over

seriously, and to try to decide before next Sunday whether or not they will become Christians, to rise. It is our experience that a large number will rise at such an invitation; some out of sympathy with others, and many because they sincerely desire, in a childish way, to become the followers of Jesus. In the week that intervenes they will have time to think the matter over, and, if they have Christian parents, they should be urged to talk with them upon the subject. If they cannot talk with their parents, then with their Sunday-school teachers or some experienced friend.

The next Sunday all these children, and very likely others, will remain to the Sunday-school prayer meeting, and it may be well to ask them then how many have thought the matter over carefully, and have finally decided to devote their lives to the Saviour. It would seem best to make the decision seem a very plain and simple matter, but also a very serious matter, and to warn the boys and girls that they must make no pledges lightly or without full determination to carry them out. The great danger at this stage is that some, influenced by others, and with a feeble, half-formed determination to do better, will pledge themselves without really meaning anything by it; but this danger can largely be guarded against by a few words of serious explanation of the nature of the Christian life, and of its being a matter of eternal import, and therefore not to be trifled with.

The serious may further be sifted out from the

frivolous by asking all the children who wish to know more about the Christian life, and who are really in earnest to be followers of the Saviour, to come to the pastor's house some week-day, appointing one day for the girls and another for the boys. For the most part, only those who are really in earnest will accept such an invitation ; and the opportunity this will give for private, personal talk with each of the children will be invaluable.

After four or five such Sunday-school prayer meetings, followed by such supplementary meetings at the pastor's house, it will be easy to sift the merely impulsive from the deeply serious or truly converted ; and then it might be well to present to the boys and girls some simple pledge to which they shall sign their names, and which they can keep in their Bibles, and read over every day until it is ingrained into their minds. Every pastor will choose to make out his own pledge, perhaps, but we would suggest the following, as very simple and yet comprehensive : —

TRUSTING in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I promise Him that I will try to do whatever He would like to have me do ; that I will pray to Him and read the Bible every day, and that, just so far as I know how, *throughout my whole life I will try to lead a Christian life.*

Signed .....

The children, as we have said, should be encouraged in every way to talk with their parents and other friends about the matter, and perhaps, if they are quite young, should take the pledge home and show it to their parents before they sign it. Very few parents will refuse to allow their children to sign such a pledge, and it will please them to know that everything that is done for their boys and girls is open and aboveboard. And now the real work of Christian nurture begins. The start has been made, the entering wedge has been driven, the door has been opened for the admission of the Spirit, and now comes the pastoral training and all the many good influences which an active church can throw around its children. Now comes in the opportunity for the Young People's Society to set these young Christians at work, and fit them for future usefulness. Now may properly be formed a church-membership class for these lambs, in which they shall be instructed as to the requirements and duties of the church, and from which, in due time, they shall be graduated into the church of God.

We make these suggestions because in practice this plan has been found to work admirably. Doubtless there are many modifications and improvements which each pastor, in his practical application of it, can suggest; but is not the Sunday-school prayer meeting one method of leading the boys and girls, the hope of the church in years to come, to take the first step?

We do not mean to say that a Sunday-school prayer

meeting is the only door of entrance to the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor. It is only one way to begin. Doubtless it may often be best to establish such a society without waiting for or striving for the impetus of an increased religious interest.

The very fact that such an organization is established, and that it brings each young person face to face with the question, "Am I a Christian?" is often of itself enough to awaken new interest in religious things. In many instances we have known the question, "Will you join our society as an active member, that is, as a professed Christian?" to be the turning point in a young soul's experience. He has been wavering hitherto, perhaps, not willing to avow himself an unbeliever or an enemy of Christ, by any means, but hardly daring to be counted among Christ's friends. He would not think of joining the church. No one would urge him to take that step yet. But here is his opportunity. "Will you become an active member of our society?" says one of his young friends. He is brought face to face with a question which must be decided one way or the other, and this fact will often be enough to lead the religiously inclined to decide forever for the right.

"Will this society be sufficient to fit all young people who join it for church membership, without any other means of training?"

We should think not. Careful instruction should go with this means of Christian nurture. The Christian life must be explained, its duties enforced, the nature and object of the church taught, the creed of

the church inculcated; and this can hardly be done in such meetings as this society contemplates.

These meetings are meant to insure the constant reconsecration and to promote the heart devotion of the young Christians. The instruction for the head, as to the technicalities of theology and Christian living, should be given in some other way; and we know of no better way than to form a pastor's catechetical class. Such a class, carried on at least for a few months of each year, will greatly help the work of the society, and will largely tend to the rooting and grounding of the young Christians in the faith.

Another question which often arises in some form is, "After all, is it not best for the pastor to remain away from the meetings of young people, in order that they may be less embarrassed?" We should answer this with a very emphatic No. No pastor has any business to be so out of sympathy with his young people that his presence at their meetings shall embarrass them. If he must be absent from any meeting, let it not be from the young people's meeting. If he feels that his presence will make this meeting less free, then, by all means, should he go to it, until he becomes so familiar with his boys and girls, and they with him, that they shall regard him as one of themselves, or rather as an elder brother, who will lead them around all pitfalls and over all rough places. As we have somewhere said before, it does not seem best to us that the pastor should lead these meetings, but he should be present as one of the young people at heart, however gray his locks

may be, and he will thus learn, as he can learn in no other way, how the lambs of his flock are prospering, and what peculiarities of feeding and folding each one needs.

The great danger that we fear for the success of these societies is that they may be left too much to manage themselves. Many will doubtless be started which will soon die out, simply through lack of interest, or organizing ability, or hard work, on the part of the pastor and a few older Christians. This method is no labor-saving contrivance. To keep it up to the right standard will doubtless involve a large amount of personal work and oversight and thought on the pastor's part, and it will add to his burdens very considerably. We only claim that this is a method for making the work of the earnest, faithful pastor tell more effectively upon his young people. This is a fulcrum by means of which, if sufficient prayerful energy is put forth, the whole spiritual plane of the young people may be raised.

It will be seen that the Society of Christian Endeavor is meant to be a very flexible organization. Each pastor can mould it according to the needs of his particular flock. It can embrace within its scope a great many departments of Christian effort.

It will be noticed that in the constitution provision is made for a Missionary Committee, a Sunday-School Committee, a Relief Committee, and a Flower Committee, besides the other committees whose duties have already been enlarged upon. We need not dwell at any great length upon the work of these

committees, for their duties are fully specified in the constitution. Every one of them is designed to meet a real need, and every one adds to the work and responsibilities which the young people may assume. For instance, take the work of the Missionary Committee. No church is doing what it should until it gives of its money and its sympathy and its prayers to carry the gospel to those who have it not. Where can the true missionary spirit be better inculcated than in such a society? For not only can attention be directed to missionary topics in various ways, but the plan of systematic giving can be introduced, and every boy or girl may have the chance of devoting something, if it is only one cent a month, to missionary work. This plan has already been adopted in at least one society, and has been found to work admirably, and to considerably increase the benevolent contributions of the church. What better opportunity of raising up a new generation of systematic givers can be afforded? Lessons in practical philanthropy at home can also be afforded, for the Relief Committee can bring any case of sickness or want to the notice of the others, and practical measures can be taken to furnish help when needed. In fact, any Christian work, from the furnishing of a basket of flowers for the pulpit to the support of a missionary in Africa, may come within the province of this society, for, where this agency exists, there will always be a compact and organized band of young people to whom, if they are properly guided, such work may be intrusted with incalculable benefit to themselves and others.

It is too soon, as yet, with modesty, to say much of good results which have been accomplished by this organization, though very many pleasant things have come to our ears. We are only girding on the harness, and we boast not ourselves as he that putteth it off. There are no means of making an accurate enumeration, but there must now be several hundred societies called by the same name, and with the same general constitution, scattered all over the country, and in nearly all denominations.

We should like to give in detail scores of letters we have received, so full are they of good cheer and enthusiasm, thankfulness for past blessings, and hopeful zeal for the future. Many report numerous conversions and large accessions to the churches with which they are connected.

Others report quickened interest among the young Christians already connected with the church. Others, still, tell of the increasing confidence of older church members in youthful piety.

Several churches where this plan has been adopted, which had before received no additions for years, have of late received very considerable accessions to their working forces from among the young. A conference of these societies has been held in Portland, and a permanent organization effected. This conference has no ambitious designs, but simply hopes to bring the representatives of the different societies in the same vicinity together once a year, to talk over affairs of mutual interest, and to enable the young people, by means of circular letters and

in other ways, to make helpful suggestions one to another, in regard to methods of work, proved useful by experience.

While preparing this little book we have been pursued by a fear of seeming to assume more knowledge upon this subject of Christian nurture than our brethren, or of seeming to ride a hobby in advocating the Society of Christian Endeavor. We wish to disclaim any such intentions. We believe that this is *one step* in the right direction. We would claim nothing more. There is a chance for indefinite enlargement and extension of the plan. There is a chance for the exercise of different gifts, and for the play of peculiarities of disposition and training. Circumstances and surroundings will modify the plans suggested, and will make each organization different in some respect from every other.

The details of organization may vary indefinitely, but with the two essentials — weekly recommitment on the part of all the young disciples to their Master, and constant watchfulness and oversight on the part of the pastor and older Christians — no such society can wholly fail of accomplishing good.

We pray and hope for the day when some special agency for Christian nurture shall be established in every church, so that our earthly Jerusalem may be full of boys and girls. We hope and pray and labor that the children of the coming generation may be trained *by the church, for the church, in the church.*

APPENDIX.

Children and Public Worship. — The Veneration of the Ancient Jews for their Temple. — The Statistics about Church-going. — Why are not the Children in the Pews? — Testimony of Representative Christian Men of Portland concerning early Church-going. — What this Testimony teaches.

To win Boys and Girls to Public Worship, — *First*, Understand them. *Second*, Be manly. *Third*, Present the Youth's Side of Truth. *Fourth*, Give a new Bent to much of the Home Life. *Fifth*, Modify many prevailing Theories regarding the Conversion of Children. *Sixth*, Continue the Revision of much Sunday-School Effort. *Seventh*, Appreciate the joyous Hopefulness of a Church *full* of Children.

THE question of the attendance of children upon public worship is such a vital question, and is so nearly related to the subject of the preceding pages, that we feel moved to devote a chapter to its consideration. The following facts and deductions, first presented by the author in a sermon to his own people, were published in the *Christian Union*, were thence copied into other religious papers, and are reproduced in the hope that tne facts here collated, gathered from the citizens of one community, may suggest to the people of many communities some of the causes and some of the remedies for the falling off in attendance upon public worship.

We have preserved the homiletical and personal form in which these thoughts were first cast, as more direct and pointed.

"Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of God from Jerusalem." —*Is.* ii. 3.

I wish I could give you some little idea of the enthusiastic love and veneration with which the Jews regarded their ancient Temple. It was the centre of the world to them. There was no glory, no beauty, no grace, which did not dwell within its sacred walls. It was an honor to the highest dignitary in all the land to step even within its outer vestibule; while within the mysteries of its holy of holies, not the proudest or mightiest monarch that the world ever saw was allowed to set foot. David himself declared, when in the zenith of his power, that he, the king, coveted the place of a door-keeper in the house of God. "I was glad," he said again, — and notice what an apparently trivial thing, according to our modern notions, he was glad about, — "I was glad," not when I conquered my enemies and won a great battle or was firmly established upon my throne, but when, with the band of pilgrims I approached Jerusalem and the Temple; "when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord," — let us go to church.

Times surely have wonderfully, not to say wofully changed since David sang and Isaiah prophesied. Now about the last thing that most men rejoice in is

an invitation to go to church. When our legislators come together at Washington, there are a thousand applicants for door-keeper of Congress, but I have never heard any very ardent aspiration for the office of door-keeper in the house of the Lord.

Numerous counts and estimates in which the churches have indulged of late seem to show conclusively that the masses do not go to church. The reporter has been through the Chicago and Cincinnati churches and those of other large cities, pencil and note-book in hand, and has found but very few of them more than one quarter or one third full, and has estimated, if I remember rightly, that less than one sixth of the Protestant population of those cities are regular church-goers. In New England and in the country, doubtless, the proportion of church-goers to the population is larger; but even here the regular attendants on the house of God are often in a pitiable minority.

This is not a local evil. Our friends across the sea are agitating the same question, and attempting to stem the same evil. The statistics of seventy cities and districts of England and Wales, in which the aggregate population is over three and one half millions, show that the actual church-goers number only a trifle over a million, — considerably less than one third of the population ; and even this proves to be a higher ratio than was expected. Take the country through, the sitting accommodation of the churches in the Old Country is not equal to the wants of one half the people, and less than one half of that is used.

So notorious have these facts become, the world over, that some point is given to the exaggerated sarcasm of that new light in the infidel world, Mr. Miln, who, having tried many churches in turn, now seeks to decry all churches. I say some point is given to his strained sarcasm when he says, "Those only attend prayer meetings who wish to be alone."

"We know," he continues, "that the churches, which should be thronged with eager worshippers, are left half empty, unless indeed some unusual person or cause serves to evoke a spasm of curiosity. This apathy is not confined to any one circle, individual, sect, or church. The Presbyterians feel it, and have recently sent a commission through the churches of that sect to ascertain and remove, if possible, its cause. The Methodists feel it, and are found discussing ways and means for its removal. The Congregationalists confess the same lethargy. As to the Episcopalians, so poorly are their churches attended, that only the most ingenious usher can spread a congregation out to look a respectable audience."

But it is more profitable for us to look still nearer home. A little more than a year ago, a careful and accurate count was made by one of our citizens, in all the churches of Portland, and he found that whereas there were in all our Protestant churches sittings for 16,175 of our 25,000 Protestants, only 8,021 people, all told, were found at the preaching services throughout the entire day, or in the proportion of less than one in three of our Protestant population. But the most startling branch of his statistics related to the num-

ber of children in these churches. In all these twenty-seven churches there were only 736 children under fourteen years of age. That, I say, is the most startling and significant part of these statistics, — that out of all the thousands of Protestant children who throng our public schools every day of the week, only 736 were found with their parents in the pews on Sunday.

To bring the matter still nearer home: In the nine Congregational churches of our city there were present that day 1,789 people all told, an average of a trifle less than 200 to each church; while of this number only 248 were children under fourteen years of age, an average of only 27 to each church.

In the Sabbath schools of these nine Congregational churches are 2,100 persons, and presumably a very large proportion of them are children. Then only about one seventh of the number of children in the Sabbath schools of these churches attended the church service.

Now, to what do these statistics point us? Just this, I think: that right here do we find the principal and most alarming cause of empty pews and indifference to church-going. The children are not required to go with their parents. Their religious training is relegated more and more to the Sunday school. The great family pews, filled with six, eight, or a dozen children, from the little fair-haired tot of two years up to the manly elder brother or womanly elder sister, are no longer found; partly because such families do not exist in large numbers (more is the pity for the welfare of our land), and partly because,

while the parents may be at church to save the respectability of the family, the chilren are anywhere and everywhere else. They are out riding or walking, or are sleeping at home, or reading a flash newspaper or an exciting novel.

We in this generation are just beginning to feel the evil effects of this loose family government and home training in regard to church-going. The generation immediately preceding ours slackened the reins, and the empty pews in many churches show that the young colts have run away. What shall we expect in the generation which is to follow ours, when, as in many cases, the reins have been thrown entirely away and the colts allowed to roam at their own sweet will? This, I say, — and I do not think the position can be successfully combated, — is the great cause of the lack of attendance at our churches; and this cause, unless the evil is checked, will decimate our churches in the future.

I am fully aware that many other causes have entered in to thin the congregations; but what I say is that this is the predominant and overwhelmingly the most significant cause of this change in the habits of our people.

In order to test this influence of the early habits of church-going upon the future lives of Christian men as fully as I could in our own city of Portland, I have, within the past fortnight, sent out about fifty postal cards to various representative, Christian men in our different churches. The card I sent read as follows: —

"*Dear Sir*, —Desiring to learn if the present decline in church attendance, so often complained of, is a reaction from Puritanical strictness in the past, as is frequently alleged, or is due to laxity of parental authority, will you be so kind as to tell me, —

"1. Whether in early life you were required to attend church regularly?

"2. If so, did such compulsion render church-going irksome or repulsive to you?

"Any other facts from personal experience, or from that of others bearing upon this point, will be gratefully received. I have addressed this same inquiry to a number of the Christian men of Portland, hoping that by the answers some light may be thrown on this important subject."

Of course I was able to get the opinions of only a small number of the representative Christian men of the city; there were hundreds of others who could just as well have answered these questions, but, in order to reach a definite class, I sent my inquiries to the deacons of the Congregational and Baptist churches, and to a few of the prominent men in other churches whose names were given me. For the most part I went entirely outside of my own church, and did not ask those men whose early training I was acquainted with; so that, so far as it went, this was a fair and impartial test. You will notice also, from the wording of my questions, that I attempted not to show any bias of opinion in my queries.

Of these fifty men, more or less, of whom I have asked these questions, forty-five kindly responded. Of these forty-five who replied, four were Episcopalians, five were Methodists, three were Free Baptists, eight were Baptists, and twenty-five were

Congregationalists. Of these forty-five men, embracing a large proportion of the officers in our churches, three were not required to go to church when young, and forty-two were. Of these three who were not required to go, two went of their own accord. Two others of my correspondents make a distinction between being required to go and being solemnly and earnestly urged to go; that is, between physical and moral compulsion. But that kind of compulsion came within the intent of my inquiry. Where it is the regularly expected thing for children to attend church, as much as to attend school, that is the best kind of compulsion.

Of those forty-five, then, from whom I have received answers, forty-two were required to go to church as children; two were not required to go, but nevertheless went.

Forty-two did not consider church-going irksome or repulsive; one did consider it irksome, but not repulsive; one considered it irksome, but not because of the compulsion; and one did not go, and so of course did not find church attendance repulsive.

So you see the testimony of these forty-five representative Christian men, obtained without collusion or knowledge as to the end to which their testimony would be put, almost with unanimity tells that their early training required church attendance, and that such attendance did not drive them away from church, even for a time.

In view of these facts, what becomes of the threadbare and sickly plea, "I am afraid to require any

religious duties of my child lest he acquire a distaste for them"? Just exactly as sensible is the plea, "I am afraid to require any ablutions of my child lest he acquire a distaste for a clean face."

Now, what do these statistics show us in regard to the probable effect of church-going upon the boys and girls of to-day?

So far as this testimony goes, we learn that the chances of the boys and girls of the present generation becoming eminent and useful Christians are as forty-four to one in favor of those who attend church, as forty-two to three in favor of those who are required to attend; and the chances that they will be repelled and disgusted by such requirement are only as one to forty-five.

Or, to put the matter in still another way, so far as these testimonies prove anything, they prove that of those who become particularly eminent and useful in the church in mature life, nearly ninety-eight per cent went to church regularly as boys, that ninety-four per cent of them were required to go, and that ninety-six per cent were not repelled from church, even for a little while, by such requirement.

That is what these answers teach. Perhaps some one will say, "You have too few facts to generalize upon"; but people and cities are much the same everywhere. Portland is probably neither much better nor worse than other cities of its size, and, beyond a doubt, what is true here is true elsewhere. I wish I could read you some letters which I have received, for many of my correspondents have kindly

answered at considerable length and have given me suggestions which I would be glad to lay before you, if time permitted.

Some of these letters are pathetic in their veneration of the loved parents by whose side these gray-haired men once walked to the house of God. One says, "My first recollection of church-going was with my mother of blessed memory, when I was from six to eight years of age, which was always a pleasure and delight." Another says, "At the age of four, my good Christian mother took me by the hand and led me to the old Federal Street Church. Did I ever consider church-going repulsive? No; most emphatically. I have always felt how great a debt of gratitude I owe my parents for their early Christian training." Another who was required to go to church three times a day says, "Being required to attend regularly, I acquired thereby an appetite for it, that nothing else save eternal attendance in the great congregation of the blessed, up yonder, can ever satisfy." Two more say, that though trained up with all the rigor of Scotch Presbyterianism, church-going soon became and always continued a pleasure to them. Another tells me, "If there is anything I thank my parents for, it is that they made this requirement of me."

Another says, "I no more expected to stay away from church services than from school. The habit thus formed in my early home I found so strong when I came to the city that I could not stay away from church." Another writes, "The habit of church-going became so fixed that, apart from religious prin-

ciple, I could never connect the idea of anything pleasant with Sabbath breaking." Another tells us that "he early learned that God required him to go to His house, and that He required his parents to have him go, thus the reasonableness of the requirement was seen and felt." Still another says, "Church-going became a fixed habit and a necessity as much as daily meals."

There is a singular uniformity in the testimony upon this point. "We never thought of going anywhere else than to church on Sunday," says one. "I never thought there was any other way to do," says a second. "No compulsion was necessary; we expected always to go," says a third. "Was it irksome? I never thought of such a thing," says a fourth.

Most of these men, when children, never thought whether they were compelled to go to church or not; it was so much the regular order of the family, that any other course would have seemed unreasonable and wrong to them. A very prominent business man of another communion than ours writes, "I should as soon have expected my parents to say that I might stay at home from school as a reward, as that I might remain at home from meetings as a similar agreeable and pleasant thing." Ah, that of which these letters so often speak is the best kind of compulsion, not the iron hand dragging the child to church, but the sweet expectation, the natural order of the household, the unquestioned habit of the family, the propriety of which was never doubted. Where

such expectation and habit are the order of the household and the father and mother lead the way, saying "Come," and not "Go," there is never a need of sterner compulsion. That is the way in which the vast majority of the Christian men of Portland, and presumably of all similar cities, were trained up for the responsible places they fill. If there are to be such men in the future they will be trained in the same way.

In this connection we are glad to present to our readers the opinions of Rev. J. G. Merrill, of St. Louis, who has been successful, as few ministers have been, in securing an interested hearing from the boys and girls of his congregation, and who has earned the right to speak with authority upon boys and girls at public worship. He writes: —

"To secure the public worship that will bless our boys and girls we need: —

"*First.* To understand boy and girl life. Some one has said that among the greatest discoveries of our inventive age the greatest has been the discovery of children. A man does not need to be forty years old to recall the time when childhood and youth were practically ignored by authors and artists, preachers and poets. Boys and girls are a variable quantity. To understand a boy of ten years is not to know him at fourteen, to know a lass at eight is not to know her at thirteen. The mental and moral change, undergone between eleven and fifteen, is no less marked than the physical change during the same period. Many a quiet lad enters this period

bashful and comes out boisterous, or changes from a noisy boy to a sedate youth. Many a miss changes in these few months from a coy maiden to a flirt, or from a rude girl to a matronly one. Young folks do not understand themselves at this time of life, and are usually very sure that no one else understands them.

"He who can help humanity over the years from seven to seventeen can guide the race. He must not fail, as a help to secure this result, to remember his own boyhood or girlhood. "Only that man in whom the child heart hath not died can successfully teach the young." A child heart need not die, for, as the prophet says, "Behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy: for the child shall die a hundred years old."

"*Second.* Another prerequisite in the solution of our problem is that he who would win boys and girls must be manly. A boy who cannot tell his letters can read men. There is something within a healthful boy or girl which makes them attracted by strength and intrepidity. They would rather be driven than coaxed, but prefer above either of these to be strongly led.

"A nice young man, with a sweet lisp, hair parted in the middle and a waxed mustache, is more in his place in a dancing-school than in the pulpit, with the boys and girls looking him through. A fussy old man, who is never so happy as when he is toasting his embroidered slipper over the grate, can do more at sewing societies than among the rising generation.

It was the rough and ready Peter who was bidden, 'Feed my lambs.'

"*Third.* To win boys and girls to public worship one must present the youth's side of truth. Boys and girls need the same truths that their seniors do; no greater mistake is made than by those who think that talk to children should be childish. Men have fired off their old smooth bores, with a ponderous polysyllabic sound, until the short, sharp crack of a monosyllabic rifle seems to them no gun at all.

"It is astonishing how few thoughts there are, worth the thinking, which cannot be put in such a way that a child can have thoughts concerning them. It is humiliating to take some of our finely rounded periods and see how little there is left of them when the wind is let out of them. The thoughts which Jesus thought more than any man of history, thinking and speaking as he did, are best expressed in words and sentences such as a quick-minded child would use.

"As a rule, the thoughts which if properly expressed are beyond the apprehension, not to say comprehension, of bright boys and girls are illy adapted to help the adults of our congregations. Longfellow tells the truth thus:—

'Friendly the teacher stood, like an angel of light there among them,
And to the children explained the holy, the highest, in few words,
Thorough, yet simple and clear, for sublimity always is simple,
Both in sermon and song, a child can seize on its meaning.'

"We of the pulpit need to remember the order to our brave forefathers on Bunker Hill, 'Fire low.' Shots fired high have no more powder or lead; they are vastly more valuable for noise than for execution.

"*Fourth.* To secure the children at church there must be a new bent to much home life. Public worship will rarely include the children as habitual attendants so long as it is the prevailing fashion for parents to obey their children.

"There is enough left of total depravity to make it safe to say that if the average child has his own way, attendance upon church will at the best be spasmodic, perhaps but little more irregular than would be attention to music or assigned tasks of any sort; but enough so, in all these matters, to make it desirable for the superior will to reside in one who, from a wider outlook than is possible for children, has learned the value of the more serious matters of life in the formation of character. Moreover, it is unworthy of a parent, who ought to understand children, to suggest that a child, able to go to school five or six hours on other days, is not able to attend God's house two or three hours on the Lord's day. And, provided parents have the slightest comprehension of the worth of religious instruction in relation to a soul born for two worlds, there will grow up in the household an irresistible yet loving force which will lead the youth to as little expect to go without his Sunday dinner as to stay away from church and Sunday school.

"*Fifth.* To gain the object before us we shall need to modify many prevailing theories in regard to the conversion of children. Among the evils connected with modern religious efforts none is more widespread and ruinous than that which ignores Christian nurture. Boys and girls who become Christians normally become Christians gradually. Of course there is such a thing as regeneration, and there is a moment when it takes place, but He who knows all about it, and the only One who does know all about it, says that its movements are like those of the wind, whose sound we hear, whose effects we perceive, but the manner of whose coming we do not and cannot tell.

"Is it not time in this age of the Christian church to believe that generation assists regeneration? To regard a religious bent, that has been handed down from Grandmother Eunice to Mother Lois, and thence to the youthful Timothy, as not only to be possible but to be expected? Shall a child be expected to have no better start for the kingdom because his father and mother are children of the King?

"*Sixth.* We must continue the revision which is going on in respect of our Sunday schools. Had not certain tendencies been arrested, it would have been impossible to have saved the church from destruction at the hands of an institution which ought to be and is destined to be its choicest ally.

"The peril was in affording the young a kind of religion which could not satisfy them beyond the age of youth, and at the same time destroyed all

relish for the religion which meets the wants of manhood and womanhood. The wild life of many a Sunday-school scholar comes to resent a religion which insists upon things being done 'decently and in order.' The sensational preaching, which is so greatly relished to-day, is partly in consequence of the mental imbecility fostered in Sunday schools, destitute alike of discipline and scholarship, in which the children were tickled by jingling songs, petted with prizes and picnics, fed upon books nauseating to a healthful mind, guided by those whose whole aim was to play upon the feelings of those for whom no thorough intellectual training or forceful character getting was ever dreamed.

"It is a happy omen for the generation coming on that men are learning not to expect strong manhood and womanhood save as it results from a well-disciplined childhood.

"*Seventh.* To have the boys and girls at public worship there must grow up in our hearts an appreciation of the joyous hopefulness of a church full of children. Blessed is the man that hath his quiver full of them is no truer of the father of a family than it is of a true pastor of a church. 'A Christ-loving pastor,' said Dr. Tyng, 'is a child-loving pastor.' Hawthorne remarked, 'If I value myself upon anything, it is in having a smile that the children love.' Dr. Doddridge replied to those who criticised him for laboring so greatly for the youth, 'I had rather feed the lambs of Christ than rule a kingdom.'

"Our Lord said, 'Suffer the children and forbid

them not to come unto me.' The truth is that the only child religion in the world is Christ's religion, and, thanks to the religion of Jesus, there are more joyous young hearts beating on our globe now than at any other hour the world has seen.

"These young hearts will not be young to-morrow. They are, amid appliances such as the world never afforded before, preparing themselves to shape the future of the world.

"The simple question before us is a fairly tremendous one, is the church shaping this plastic force?

"God has *ordained* but one way of applying the gospel to the minds of men. It is by the preaching of the word. Other measures are allies of this, the great force to win the world to Christ. Whomsoever, therefore, we may neglect to bring under the influence of God's house and God's word, let it not be the boys and girls."

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